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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Part II of II on Christian engagement with Islam

Be not afraid: Embracing the Muslim 'Other'

Part I of this series discussed the mutual fear, mistrust, and hatred that seems to exist between Christians and Muslims, culminating in the question "Why do they hate us?" that is being asked on both sides. As we as Christians acknowledge our responsibility in challenging these feelings, we can hopefully see Muslims as real people instead of an entity to be feared, and begin to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?" Part II gives some direction for the continued journey of responding to this question.

Dena Nicolai

CAIRO, Egypt – Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf, professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School, writes and speaks often about those he calls "the other" – those we see as being different from us. For Christians today, there is perhaps no better representative of "the other" than Muslims. Volf says "I have to will not to see the other as an enemy but as a potential friend. I have to will to see the other not as a diminishment, but as an enrichment . . . and, of course, the reason why we are not willing to embrace the other is that we are afraid."

One of the steps in moving past this fear, says Volf, is forming relationships with the other. When we invite Muslims into our homes, when we engage them as co-workers in our workplaces, and when we respect their culture when visiting Muslim countries, we form relationships in which honest dialogue can take place. This includes asking Muslims hard questions when appropriate, and being willing to answer the hard questions they may ask. We might ask Muslims about the treatment of Christian (and other) minorities in Muslim nations, the role of violence in breeding violence, and the fact that the moderate Muslim voice is not as loud as it could be. As we do this, we must recognize priest and scholar Colin Chapman's point about the struggle between moderate and radical Muslims for the "hearts and minds" of "the Muslim masses in the middle":

"Unfortunately it is not always easy to engage in dialogue with convinced Islamists. Perhaps therefore one of the things we need to pray for is that while our governments in the West protect themselves against terrorism and at the same time try to address the root cause of terrorism, moderate Muslims all over the world will be able to engage with Islamists, pointing to alternative and genuinely Islamic models of how to change the world."

Knowledge overcomes fear

We fear what we do not know, and therefore part of forming trustful relationships involves learning about "the other," on both a personal and larger level. Most colleges and universities today offer courses on World Religions, and, increasingly, on Islam in particular, open to the general public. Your home churches can also order and offer short courses on Islam, or Muslim-Christian relations – Anglican Scholar Colin Chapman has a solid one (*Cross and Crescent*), as does California's Fuller Seminary (*The World of Islam*). Learning more about the history of Western imperialism in Muslim countries is helpful as well. Says Chapman, "[Western Imperialism] has left a big scar in the minds of Muslims and they still feel they are suffering and humiliated almost because of continuing Western imperialism in new forms." Don't underestimate what this means, even to Muslims who are permanently settled in the West.

See **Christian engagement** *on p.2*

American students connect with Iranian women in Damascus, Syria.

Bearing the brunt: Poor families still waiting for recovery

Chandra Pasma

OTTAWA, Ont. – While recent headlines have proclaimed economic recovery in Canada, that is not the reality for far too many Canadian families. Last year's recession put hundreds of thousands of Canadians below the poverty line, and these are the people still struggling with the recession's ongoing impact. High unemployment, inadequate social programs and the rising cost of living all contribute to poverty and economic insecurity.

Standard poverty measures will not be available until 2011, but new research from Citizens for Public Justice on key economic trends reveals the deep impact of the recession on poverty and economic insecurity. Our trend analysis projects that the poverty rate went up to 11.7 percent in 2009, increasing the number of poor Canadians from 3 million in 2007 to 3.9 million in 2009. The child poverty rate likely increased from 9.5 percent in 2007 to at least 12 percent in 2009, an increase of 160,000 children.

Shortcomings of EI

Over 400,000 jobs were lost between October 2008 and October 2009. Those who were already economically vulnerable before the recession suffered disproportionately from job loss. One in four workers making $10 an hour or less lost his job. Employees with a high school education or less, recent newcomers to Canada and Aboriginal Canadians were also

See **Still waiting** *on p.2*

News

Christian engagement with Islam *continued*

It's also important to differentiate between religion and culture. For example, Female Genital Mutilation (female circumcision) is often attributed to Islam. However, ardently Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia expressly forbid it, while it is practiced widely in many Christian communities in Sudan. Other issues that might make us point to Islam include the poor treatment of women and the related tragedy of honour killings. While both are pressing issues in many countries in the Muslim world, they also exist to a certain extent in some Christian communities in more traditional cultures in the Middle East. Therefore, honour killings should be addressed not solely as a religious problem. When reading news about the church in Muslim countries, we should take care to remember that although Christians certainly suffer discrimination and in some cases, persecution, even Christian priests in these regions have pointed out that their problem is that they are a minority. Like other minorities, they suffer a loss of human rights under a majority power in countries ruled by autocratic regimes. Therefore, when we pray for and call for freedom for the church in these countries (as we should) we should also pray and call for freedom for all suffering minorities.

We should also push ourselves to find and read the good news and the positive changes in the Muslim world, because they do exist. Changes such as the creation of a YouTube channel by Queen Rania of Jordan, where she has invited viewers to give their opinions of the Middle East, and has then discussed those views and general stereotypes of the Arab Muslim World. Or the opening of the first coeducational college campus in Saudi Arabia (America's Princeton University did not become co-ed until 1969). Or last year's successful parliamentary elections in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world. Or finally, the courage of thousands of Iranians who took to the streets to protest the corruption of last June's presidential election and to condemn dictatorship.

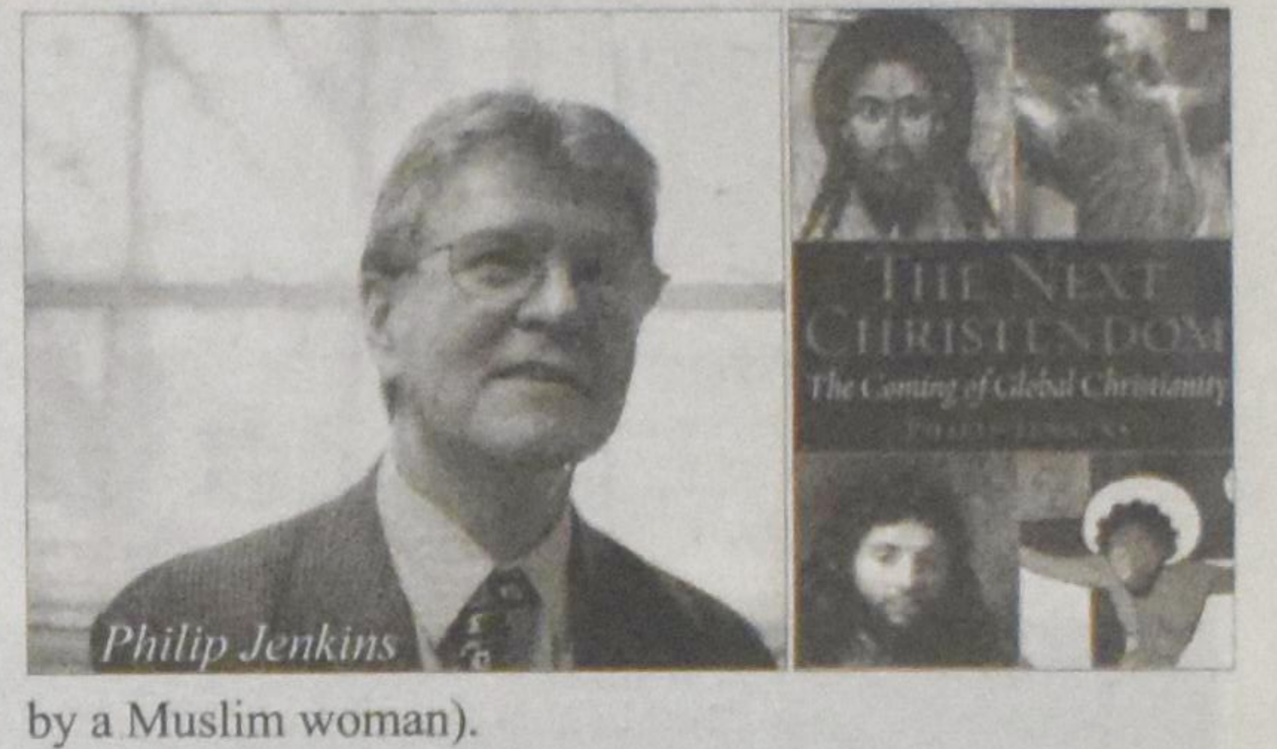
Queen Rania of Jordan welcomes Pope Benedict XVI on his first Middle East visit, May 2009.

When Westerners talk about the great Islamic threat, Iran often comes out at the top of the list. We watch videos of protests in which Iranians walk through the streets chanting "Death to America," and it seems scary. My experiences in the Middle East, however, are nothing like that. I've never met anyone more fascinated to meet North Americans than Iranians. On a recent trip to Damascus, Syria, I supervised 30 college students from the US, and we encountered large groups of Iranian religious pilgrims, visiting holy sites in Damascus. Time after time, they approached us – wanting to talk, wanting to use what English they knew, wanting to take photos with us, wanting to reassure us that they in fact did not hate us.

These Iranians were fascinated to meet "real" Americans – to see "the other" in person. It was a learning experience for all of us. To meet, to talk, and to realize that we had nothing to fear.

Walking in the Others' shoes

Christians should also be willing to listen to what Muslims have to say about us and about themselves – to walk in their shoes, so to speak. Volf challenges us "to see the other through their own eyes. What is that other's self-understanding? Equally important, I think, is seeing myself with their eyes. Then, as we are seen, we can exchange perspectives. It is only through exchanging perspectives that we can gain an adequate perception both of ourselves and of the other." As one Calvin seminary student commented, "I love Volf's point. I want to know why a Muslim would want to be a Muslim . . . what he or she sees as beautiful in Islam." There are a myriad of ways to do this – from personal conversations, to reading literature by Muslim authors, or to enjoying the humour in television shows like *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (created by a Muslim woman).



Philip Jenkins

As we build friendships, we can also build on commonalities between the two faiths. These commonalities include our call to let God into every area of our lives, our focus on humility before a majestic God, and our care for those less fortunate. As Philip Jenkins dreams in *The Next Christendom*, "In an ideal world, Christians and Muslims . . . would be engaged in a friendly rivalry as to who could best help the poor, without thought of who was gaining the greatest numbers and influence."

The perfect love of Christ

When Amber Blom-Younan was asked "Why are you here if you hate us?" on the bus in Damascus, her answer was, "Actually, I love living in Syria, and I love Syrians. In fact, I've even brought my family here from America to visit." The smile on the Muslim woman's face in response signified that something *had* changed, one person at a time.

Instead of framing Islam as a threat and Muslim-Christian relations as a war to be won, we should remember the love of Christ, which the Apostle John calls "a perfect love that drives out fear." And in this love, we should say a resounding "amen" to what Anglican priest and scholar Kenneth Cragg notes in his book, *The Call of the Minaret:* "the objective is not, as the Crusaders believed, the repossession of what Christendom has lost, but the restoration to Muslims of the Christ Whom they have missed."

Dena Nicolai (dena.nicolai@gmail.com) lives and works in Cairo, Egypt. She is originally from Edmonton. For those interested in learning more about Christian-Muslim relations, she recommends Colin Chapman's Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam. *Part I of Nicolai's series can be read online at www.christiancourier.ca .*

Still waiting for recovery *continued*

more likely to find themselves unemployed.

Employment insurance (EI) was originally created as a bridge between jobs by providing an income based on previous salary or wages. But EI was an utter failure in responding to the ravages of the recession. Despite the fact that EI coverage rose throughout the course of the recession, it only reached 51 percent of the jobless population in October 2009. In other words, nearly half of the unemployed were not receiving benefits: 777,400 people in October 2009.

Those who did qualify for benefits received very little, since average EI benefits are below the poverty line. And when someone's length of unemployment stretched out, the benefits often ran out. As many as 500,000 Canadians may have exhausted their benefits without finding new work in late 2009 and early 2010.

Compounding the problem

Canadian families without EI needed to live off their savings, credit, or social assistance. In fact, social assistance directly filled EI's gaps, as caseloads increased the most in the provinces with the lowest EI coverage. While EI has problems, it is preferable to social assistance since it is far less stigmatizing and controlling of people's lives. Social assistance also requires recipients to use up all assets and savings, making it harder for people to get back to employment.

Over the past year, social assistance caseloads have increased in every province, but Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia were particularly hard hit. Welfare caseloads in these provinces rose more than 20 percent.

Kathy Vandergrift, MPs Mike Savage and Tony Martin, Chandra Pasma and Joe Gunn at a CPJ press conference on Parliament Hill.

While hundreds of thousands of Canadian families saw their income cut, they also had to stretch their meager incomes further since the cost of living increased in 2009. Food prices across the country rose 5 percent (compared to core inflation of 0.3 percent). The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment also went up.

The rise in poverty and economic insecurity had an immediate, visible impact. The average debt load per household increased, as Canadians struggled with declining incomes and rising costs. Bankruptcies increased 36 percent between the third quarter of 2008 and the third quarter of 2009. Food bank use experienced its largest ever recorded increase, growing 18 percent between 2008 and 2009.

While 2010 has brought headlines of economic recovery, experience from previous recessions provides caution. After the last recession, it took nearly eight years for unemployment to decline to its pre-recession rate. It took 14 years for the poverty rate to return to its pre-recession level. While the government's focus seems to be on recovery and budget cutting, there is a risk that poverty and unemployment could remain high for years to come without the proper attention.

Chandra Pasma (Chandra@cpj.ca) is a policy analyst with Citizens for Public Justice.

What is Canada's current poverty line?

In this case, the poverty line is the After-Tax Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), or the point at which families spend 20 percentage points more of their income than the average family on meeting basic needs. The amount varies according to family size and location. In 2008, for example, for a family of four living in a large city the after-tax LICO was $34,738. For a smaller city, the LICO for the same four-person family would be $29,378.

News

Eternal Student
Peter Schuurman

Roots and wings: staying or leaving the CRC

To the best of my knowledge, all my close CRC (Christian Reformed Church) friends who went to a Reformed Christian college with me now call a mainline church their home. Ironically, all my friends from Christian high who went to secular universities remain in the CRC. Both groups include a sample of nine people each.

This is now 20 years after our undergraduate days, and it's not the situation I would have predicted. You would expect those with a formal Reformed education to be more firmly planted in the Reformed community.

It could be that there are other variables more determinative than the type of undergraduate institution one attends. For example, all my Christian college friends were in the humanities, they almost all went to secular university grad school, and a few of them married outside CRC circles. Conversely, all my friends who went to public university were in the sciences, did not attend grad school, and married within the CRC community.

What variables are most important in determining one's adult faith identification? This is obviously not a scientific survey. For example, many CRC Christian college students do remain CRC after they graduate. I am the one anomaly with regards to my friends, but I know many others.

The counter-intuitive nature of this situation provokes further investigation. This, of course, is not to say that keeping people in the CRC community is the supreme goal; but we do feel a sense of loss that there are things we no longer share, or which may in fact be points of disagreement. Investigating what forces might be at work may help us see ourselves better and understand our friends' decisions.

High Church Mennonites

I recently heard a research paper presented on St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winnipeg, "the fastest growing Mennonite church in Canada." Apparently a significant number of Mennonites are feeling less loyal to their ethnic/religious roots and are attracted to the aesthetics and politics of the Anglican liturgy and tradition.

Through interviews with those who had switched, it was evident that while some of the former Mennonites were intent on shedding their German Anabaptist identity completely, others were selecting what to keep and what to let go. For example, some took pride in continuing to eat many of the common German-Mennonite foods (*More With Less Cookbook*?) or in maintaining connections with the ethics of the Mennonite Central Committee. In effect, you can take yourself out of the Mennonite community, but you cannot as easily take the Mennonite community out of you.

What was particularly telling to me was that those who switched to becoming Anglicans (and baptizing their infants, even!) were all educated Mennonites, many even graduates from the Mennonite University. This may be a provocative thing to say, but you might contend that these people had left the *subculture* of German-Canadian Mennonite networks to join the *dominant culture* of English-Canadian Anglicanism. From a minority culture to a majority culture. Higher education can lift people to a higher social status.

Trial by fire vs. the warm greenhouse

There is one larger study that analyzed surveys completed by almost 2000 evangelical students (by Phillip Hammond and James Davison Hunter). It was done in the USA in 1984, but it offers some theories that may apply beyond that. They say that institutional secularism threatens the faith of evangelical students, and they easily become defensive, forming a "Christian ghetto" that reinforces their faith. On the other hand, a thoroughly Christian institution may lead students to either take their faith for granted and/or facilitate the questioning of that faith, either of which can lead towards a "falling away" from their evangelical origins. To the degree that Christian education is not indoctrination, concludes the authors, it liberalizes.

Interesting enough, other studies show those who switch denominations are always more committed church members. So students who leave the CRC do not necessarily fall away from faith; they may get churchier.

Again, this doesn't settle all the questions, and it doesn't offer a recipe in order to get the results you want. But allow me one tentative conclusion: if education is in fact not only about increasing one's skills or getting certification but rather about transformation of the student's whole life, it could be that this is happening in different ways on Christian campuses than on secular campuses. Generally speaking, it seems those who experience a trial by fire on the secular campuses find deeper appreciation of their roots. Those who grow in the warm greenhouse of Christian higher education sprout new wings.

Peter Schuurman lives in Guelph, Ontario where he parents his two children, Joseph and Petra. He is working towards his PhD and teaches World Religion at Redeemer.

New building embodies an ambitious Christian vision

Grace Miedema

HAMILTON, Ont.– Given away as a seven-month-old when his mother died, John Perkins grew up believing that nobody loved him. At 30, he realized the love of Jesus, and found his calling to build Christian community among the poor in the "apartheid society" of 1960s Mississippi. He cautions that "the call of God can't always be found quickly," but that "finding the will of God is done by looking for where his work is being done."

(L-R) Big John Perkins, Dr John Perkins, Graham Cubitt & Jeff Neven

On May 7, over 100 people attended *Beyond Charity: Christian Social Engagement and Community Renewal* as part of Homestead Christian Care's vision of mobilizing committed Christians towards creating positive change in their communities. It was held at a tired-looking former nightclub in east Hamilton, a building now christened the Perkins Centre, after Dr John Perkins. Perkins was there to give the keynote address on the need for belonging – and how that is found in family, a supportive Christian community, and – ultimately – in Christ.

Switching back and forth from conference speaker to southern evangelist, Perkins lamented the fact that people could be both outspoken Christians and outspoken racists at the same time. He decried our ability to put people into boxes – liberal, conservative, socialist, capitalist – and then hate the category while claiming to love the individual. He questioned the wisdom of teaching a man to fish, but refusing him access to the lake. With prophetic zeal he pointed out that Christians often get confused about the importance of God's justice, acting like "justice is just mercy."

The hands and feet of God

The Perkins Centre project will feature 46 affordable apartments over a community centre. Combining funding from senior levels of government with support from generous donors, it will create a context for community-renewing activities. Indeed, the building itself will contribute to environmental justice, being 41 percent more energy efficient than Model Buildings standards.

Graham Cubitt, a Homestead Director, summed up the opportunities for his organization and others: "Dr. Perkins has encouraged us to give ourselves wholly to Christ's work of reconciliation. But prioritizing others' needs is something we need the Spirit's help to do, because it doesn't come naturally."

While Homestead Christian Care continues to provide housing and supports to people living with serious mental illnesses, the Perkins Centre will become so much more. Perkins mused about how God transforms things in his ever-gracious way. "I come from a family known for boot-legging, gambling, and all sorts of vice. When I gave my life to Christ, I asked that he redeem my family name. Now here we are, standing in a place formerly despised for drugs, guns, and prostitution – and we're putting my name on the building! It's amazing how Jesus can redeem both a place and a name."

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Guest Editorial/Editorial

Checking for addictions

Chris Steenhof

As I sit down to write this editorial, I have to admit, I'm distracted. There's the ever-present temptation of joining my three sons watching the hockey game in the next room. If that were the extent of the temptation, I'd probably be able to resist. But there's also my iphone, which entices me with a soft buzzing every time I get an email.

And just as I'm able to claim victory over these amusements, I'm reminded of the really impressive video that my friend told me about last night. Perhaps, I'll just open up another window and just take a quick peak....

I need to stay focussed but it seems difficult, maybe even impossible. The digital world is so enticing, so mesmerizing, so much more appealing than my present reality, that I feel its tightening grip on my attention, on my life itself. But back to the editorial.

The irony of the situation is that, when I sat down to write the article about the digital world, it's that very world that's distracting me from accomplishing the task. And it's also that characteristic of this new landscape that I wanted to explore.

The teacher's mandate

I'm an educator who frequently tries to use technology as a teaching tool. To ignore this world is to not speak the same language as my students, to be a foreigner in their technology-driven subculture. But as a Christian educator, I also believe it's my mandate to help them navigate this landscape in a Christian way, with wisdom and discernment.

The organization Adbusters sponsors a yearly event called "Digital Detox Week." During the week, participants are encouraged to unplug themselves from their digital devices. It's a week where one can rediscover a life not dominated by the clutch of cell phones, laptops, computers, and ipods. No checking email, updating Facebook, twittering, or even getting the latest on the Tiger Woods story.

With one of my classes we participate in a similar type of week. But this year I started thinking a little deeper about this activity. I've read plenty of books and articles lately about the dangers for individuals and for our society as a whole of this obsession with technology, so I'm aware of that side of the argument.

But I'm also a Christian who believes that God created humans with the ability to be imaginative, inventive, and innovative, and that, when we create, produce, and use these gadgets, we are glorifying our Creator. What kind of message, then, am I sending to students when I tell them to put these inventions away, turn them off, and ignore them? Is "Digital Detox Week" to be embraced or rejected?

Recognizing the danger

On the other hand, we also have to consider the importance of discernment. Much of my job is to help students be discerning and wise in their thoughts, words, and deeds. If we were honest, we'd have to say that our culture is not being very discerning about our reliance on technology. Richard Foster, in a chapter on "Simplicity" in his book *Celebration of Discipline,* talks about recognizing that uncontrolled compulsions are usually signs of addiction and that one way to confirm an addiction is to try and give it up for a short period of time. He reminds us that it is possible to be addicted to things that in and of themselves are a creational good.

So perhaps it's time to see if we are addicted to the digital world. Some studies suggest that students are spending up to six hours behind a screen every day. I'm guessing that adults aren't too far behind. Perhaps we can discover what Foster calls the "freedom of simplicity" by unplugging just for a week.

Reducing the amount of technology in our lives may also strengthen our faith walk as well. The Christian faith is rich, and its practice requires commitment, persistence, and thoughtfulness. These are not characteristics encouraged by the digital world of constant distraction and multi-tasking. Without these digital diversions, we may find more time for prayer and quiet reflection and meditation on God's Word.

So I guess I've come to a definite conclusion: Next year, my family and I will participate once again in "Digital Detox Week," not because technology is evil or sinful, but to help us gain some biblical perspective and balance.

But now that I'm done writing the editorial, I suppose I could quickly check my email, or find that youtube video, or finish watching the hockey game with my sons.

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Canada

It's about *how* you teach sex

Bert Witvoet

Dalton McGuinty giveth, and Dalton McGuinty taketh away. It's hard to bless him for either one. The Ontario premier recently announced a new sex education curriculum for Ontario schools next year. Three days later he cancelled it because it needs a "rethink." No wonder: there was a strong outcry against his proposals, and next year is, after all, an election year in Ontario. That does not mean that the new curriculum is going out the window. In a way, it's not all that new apparently. Much of what was proposed is already being taught, if not exactly at the prescribed grade level.

The new curriculum features in Grade 1: lessons on body parts (in addition to fingers and toes, we may assume), in Grade 3: lessons on visible and invisible differences, including a discussion on homosexuality, and in Grade 7: explicit mention of vaginal and anal intercourse. According to government officials, the new curriculum accepts the fact that adolescents are sexually active at a younger age than in the past. Much better to have a teacher in front of a class lead that discussion than to have kids pick this information up from the street. Not a bad argument, I think.

According to Premier McGuinty the new curriculum applies to "all students in publicly funded schools, including Catholic schools" (*National Post* April 22). A spokesperson for the Ottawa Catholic School Board rejects that notion. He indicated that homosexuality, for example, will not be discussed until Grade 8, and will be taught from a faith perspective, which considers homosexual acts to be "disordered" rather than an interesting variety on human behaviour. The Catholic School does not intend to relinquish its right to teach from a biblical perspective. More power to them!

The lowest denominator

In the public schools such a faith perspective will be absent. Since the emphasis there is consistently on pluralism and equality of values, we know that students will be told that homosexuality is normal and that the main concern for "safe" sex is expressed from a physical health perspective. The spiritual and moral side to sexual behaviour will not get its due attention.

I don't question the need for schools to inform students about sex and sexuality. I don't buy into the argument that all of this is best left to the parents. Most parents don't do a very good job of teaching their children about sex. Besides, they don't have the advantage of talking to a group of learners, which makes the lesson less threatening. When it's properly done, sex education in school can be a blessing and can reinforce the idea that sex is an integral part of the way God has created us. Sex is good!

That young people are sexually more active than their counterparts were in the past is generally true, but it seems as if the Ontario government prefers to adapt to that reality rather than change it. Playing to the lowest common denominator assures that the lowest level will become the standard. We are sure that many parents prefer to keep children innocent for a longer period of time than the Ministry of Education intends. Innocence is a prerequisite for healthy growth at the appropriate time. You don't plant your garden before the danger of frost has passed. A 13-year-old can be quite wise without knowing about anal intercourse.

It shows too little

When I think of this new curriculum touted as wisdom by the Ontario government, I am reminded of what Pope John Paul II once said about pornography. "It's not that pornography shows too much," he said. "It's that it shows too little." What a profound statement to make. If you compare a pornographic depiction of a woman to a painting of a nude by someone like Rembrandt, for example, you know what the Pope means. Rembrandt exposes just as much body as does a Playboy photo, but Rembrandt shows *more.* He shows the inner character of the woman, which makes the painting nobler and more edifying. Pornography is reductionistc. It focuses on flesh – on body shape and body pose. There is no other message in it other than that it seeks arousal from the viewer and invites the objectification of the other person.

The way public schools teach sex resembles that reductionism. It's not that public school teachers will work with pornographic material, nor that they will speak in favour of anal intercourse. We may assume that they do not make a point of encouraging immoral conduct. But the spiritual dimension of sexual intercourse will be missing in the lesson plan. God's intent for sexual behaviour will not be written on the blackboard. What is left is a heroic attempt to make young children well informed about what goes on in our

Successful dualism

Re: Defining success in ministry" (*CC* April 26)

Jesus' words in Matthew 25:21 – "Enter into the Master's joy" – reflect that it brings God pleasure when we take actions that are faithful to his call on our lives. What brings God more pleasure ... an accountant giving advice to a client, an artist exploring a new style of visual expression or a pastor preparing a sermon? Maybe none of the above brings God pleasure. Maybe all of the above bring God pleasure. It depends on whether the person's actions are faithful to God's call on each individual's life.

Unfortunately, the "Defining success in ministry" article strongly reinforced the dualistic perspective that pastors are the ones who are "in ministry." I believe the best way to evaluate the faithfulness of our ministry as a community of believers would be to genuinely hold each person in the church accountable for how each person is stewarding their daily lives as they meet the basic (or sometimes complex) needs of others to the glory of God.

If individuals are expanding their faithfulness in following God's purpose for their lives, then the church is achieving a critical goal by enabling each person to grow in faithfulness and to be affirmed that their contribution to the world brings God pleasure (even if their work is not stereotypically "spiritual" in nature). The church could expand exponentially if the community of believers expects that every person is "in ministry" rather than leaving the "ministry" work for the pastor.

I'd recommend an inspiring, non-dualistic book written by Dennis Bakke entitled *Joy at Work*.

Ian Cubitt
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Two tips for writers:

1. Read, read, read. "Kids do too much writing in school and not enough reading. We wouldn't say to a kid in the world of music 'Go write me a song,' without first learning music, but we do that all the time with writing."– from an exclusive *CC* interview with renowned author Avi. For more from Avi, turn to page 10.

2. Then write. Enter the *Christian Courier's* short story contest. Only one month left! Send your entries by June 15 to brett@christiancourier.ca. Prizes will be given for first and second place to adults (1000 to 3000 words) and youth (under 1000 words). All stories will be considered for publication in *CC*.

It's about *how* you teach sex *continued*

society and families without giving them the tools to stand over against the destructive patterns of that society. Being informed is not the same as being formed into responsible stewards of our sexuality.

Saved sex is safe sex

Christian schools do better, thank God. During the last spring break, 14 students of Smithville District Christian High School, accompanied by four teachers, visited their partner school in South Africa – Theocentric Christian School. Among the joint projects undertaken by students from both schools was a frank discussion of "safe sex." Each school had picked four mature students, who would prepare for this presentation and then come together during the visit to coordinate their talk.

The presentation was a great success by all accounts. The team members were wearing a wristband that read "SSISS." Translation: "Saved Sex Is Safe Sex." What they meant was that young people should abstain from sexual intercourse until they are married. They should save their virginity until they are committed to each other. That is the only way to make sex "safe," physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually. In fact, a young couple from SDCH informed the classes they visited that they had dated each other for a year and had promised each other to wait. That confession made a deep impression on the South African students. Sex is not easily talked about in South Africa, and dating usually includes sexual activity, even among Christians. There is no healthy protocol for dating there.

Premier McGuinty and the people who developed this new curriculum could learn from the joint presentation by these students. Would the Ontario Ministry of education be willing to distribute SSISS bands in the high schools of the province?

A note to our readers

Newspapers in North America are changing dramatically. They are facing declining readership, growing competition, and mounting financial problems. Some are collapsing as we speak.

Christian Courier has a long and accomplished track record of engaging our culture for Christ. It keeps Christians up-to-date with insightful analyses of contemporary events, political and economic developments, and pressing global crises. But it needs your help.

The good news is that you don't have to support *CC* with a hope that, someday, somehow, it might eventually renew itself.

You can support *CC* now because the Gospel is already renewing it! *CC* has been reshaping its approach, refreshing its writers and commentators, and finding new ways of engaging and reforming contemporary culture.

Christian Courier is a transformed media enterprise that is attracting up-and-coming Christian writers and innovative Christian thinkers. They are already helping us see more clearly what is going on in the world, what developments are healthy and which are deforming, and pointing to renewed, transformed options. *CC* is shoring up its old print system while testing out new electronic formats.

The renewal of *Christian Courier* certainly caught my attention over the past year. It is a work in progress, already richly deserving of a broadened readership, our subscriptions, enlarged writer input, and most of all, our financial gifts.

Let's keep this media gem afloat and flourishing. Let's see where the Spirit blows *CC* amidst the cross-winds of secularism and nationalism, materialism and greed, individualism and collectivism, security-ism and militarism, and even church-ism, that today spin and confuse so many Christians.

Let's get our cheques out. Sorry, I meant: login and begin that electronic funds transfer....

Shalom,
John Hiemstra
Professor of Political Science
Dean, Faculty of Social Science
The King's University College

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People, not profits: Or, what would Jesus drink?

"Indifference to injustice is more insidious than the injustice itself." – Dr. Cornel West

Emily Wierenga

HAMILTON, Ont. – Canadians consume over 40 million cups of coffee a day.

That's 14,600 million opportunities to help alleviate world poverty each year.

The majority of the globe's 25 million coffee producers earn less than 10 percent of their product's total profits, thereby eliminating any chance to send their children to school or even keep food on the table.

"I'm not sure if you can be called a Christian if you're not acting out your faith in a way that is helping the marginalized," says retired teacher Rita Bailey, who chairs the Social Justice Committee at St. Joseph's Parish in Hamilton, Ont.

Since joining the Committee four years ago, Bailey has helped to instigate the selling of fair trade coffee after church each week. "It's not enough just to fill a seat at church on Sunday," she says. "You really need to put your faith into action, and you can't do that unless you fulfill the social justice mandate of the gospel."

The fair trade difference

Dependent on the middle man, coffee farmers' wages fluctuate with the rise and fall of the market. As a result, small coffee producers are paying for westerners to continue feeding their legally addictive habit which, for Canadians, translates into 2.6 cups of coffee per person each day.

To keep up with rising demands, farmers have resorted to selling coffee exclusively. Not only is this resulting in tropical deforestation, due to sun-grown coffee farms, but in the removal of fresh, local produce.

Fair trade certification insists upon shade-grown coffee, thereby saving the environment and local food supply; it also halts the robbery of small farmers – assuring them at least 28 cents of every dollar spent and cutting out the middle man altogether.

"Fair trade rebalances power within trade," says Michael Zelmer, communications relations manager for TransFair Canada. "Within the certification system, producers benefit from longer-term contracts, access to credit, and established price floors that protect them from exploitive prices."

MITCHELL BROWN

Rachel & Jason Hofing roast fair trade coffee at Red Hill Coffee Trade.

In spite of the economic recession, sales of fair trade products rose by 67 percent from 2008 to 2009. Although 63 percent of Canadians consume coffee on a daily basis, however, only four percent drink fair trade.

Trade before aid

Dennis Howlett, coordinator of Ottawa's Make Poverty History, was involved in establishing Canada's TransFair certifying agency over 10 years ago. "We want to help people move beyond a charity response, and understand that trade is one of the main causes of impoverishment in the third world."

It's a hard issue for people to wrap their heads around, Howlett admits, "but when it's connected to the cup of coffee they drink, it's easier for them to understand."

Going fair trade, Howlett believes, is entwined with the Christian commitment to live an ethical life. "We need to try, whenever possible, to apply the same standards and ethics which are consistent with Christian teachings, not just to our personal life, but also to our financial and economic behaviour."

It's also entwined with the Biblical Golden Rule – requiring that we reconsider the definition of "neighbour." "We are global citizens now; our neighbours are people all around the world. We have some responsibility to ensure the human dignity of people around the world."

The overarching principle of fair trade is that of right relationship between buyer and producer, explains Erin Poole, a 30-year-old chaplain who serves fair trade coffee after church at Hamilton's Little Bethel Community Church.

"The parable of the Good Samaritan answers the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' by presenting the scenario of a person in need. In the case of global fair trade, we're supporting people in need by choosing products that allow them to make a living for themselves and their families without taxing their personal health and safety or the environment."

One cup at a time

Jason and Rachel Hofing founded Hamilton's Red Hill Coffee Trade after becoming aware of the plight of coffee farmers worldwide.

"Farmers can barely feed their families, and often grow drug crops to supplement their meagre income," says Hofing, father of two who attends Meadowlands Fellowship in Ancaster. "Coffee farmers often have no access to clean water or medical treatments, and they need to enlist the help

From the Lab
Rudy Eikelboom

Of memory and dying

On Sunday afternoons, my mother and I occasionally join others at Grace Manor (in Holland Christian Homes) for a sing-along session at which we sing hymns and psalms from the old blue CRC Psalter Hymnal. We sing familiar songs which speak of our faith and assurance in the love of our Lord. Many of the people are in this long-term care facility because they are no longer able to live by themselves. For some, their bodies no longer work as intended and they need help in moving. For others, like my mother, their mental abilities are being robbed by a progressive dementia. This process is a part of what we see come to completion in death. But we sing of the faith that transcends death.

Death is a reality in our lives – not intended, in that death is a consequence of our disobedience to God, and something we have to accept till the victory of Jesus is realised for all of creation. When I think of death and dying, there are a number of issues that science has forced us to address. Some reflect the ability to keep our bodies "alive" now in circumstances in which death would once have been granted, such as after an accident that leaves a person handicapped and in chronic pain. Others deal with the possibility of using body parts as gifts to others who need them, such as in organ transplants. Behind many of these issues is the realization that death is not a unitary phenomenon but rather can occur at different levels.

For some body parts such as our skin, cells die and are replaced on an ongoing basis. For other body parts, new cells are unusual, and when a cell dies it is not replaced. For example, neurons in our brains are generally not replaced if damaged or destroyed: if you break your spine, your body is paralyzed below the break, and at this time doctors cannot provide a way for you to recover and walk again. Similarly, if brain cells die during a stroke, recovery is hard and rarely complete.

Scientists have recently found that in a few brain systems, new neurons are created throughout a person's life. This neuro-genesis has sparked considerable interest, as it suggests that recovery of brain function may be possible. This research area is in its infancy, however, and will probably not have real practical consequences for decades.

A slow death

In my mother's case, the dementia is robbing her memories, and she is no longer the full person that she was years ago. Neurons in her brain are dying. This reality is painful for all families facing a similar development in their loved ones. Many scientists are trying to understand what goes wrong in neural diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's in which the brain no longer works as it should. We know a lot about many of these diseases and in some cases can delay the progress of the disease with medication, but with other disorders this is not yet possible. Even when such drugs are available, they may have side effects and be effective for only a number of years, as with treatment for Parkinson's disease. For dementia, very little help is currently available, and we can only watch the slow loss occur.

When I think about these things, as I watch the person my mother is disappear, I have come to look at death a little differently. My father died of cancer from a lifetime of smoking. While there was a gradual decline at the end of his life, particularly the last month or two, his death now seems a momentary event where our Lord took him home. In my mother's case, the loss is more gradual and the process more extended. Our Father is taking her home, but he is taking her home one memory at a time. When I get a new computer, I transfer files and data from the old computer to the new one. I can *copy* a file, keeping it intact on both computers, or I can *move* the file, such that it is added to the new computer but disappears from the old machine. God is using the *move* command to empty my mom's memory store, her mind, bit by bit, but he is transferring her memories to a safer and better storage that will ultimately result in Mom's being in God's heavenly home with my father. And eventually I will join them.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario

People, not profits *continued*

of their smallest children in order to pick enough coffee beans to keep them eating one meal a day."

Red Hill imports coffee from nine different countries. The profits from coffee sales are sent directly to coffee cooperatives, where the money is democratically allocated.

"I contribute quarterly fees for the marketing and promotion of fair trade so that none of the coffee sales go towards TransFair," explains Hofing. "By buying fair trade, we're putting an emphasis on people, not profits. We start a new identity as those who care and allow others the dignity we expect for ourselves, instead of those who help continue the cycle of exploitation."

Always fresh, not so fair

Birthed out of Hamilton in 1964, Tim Hortons has become a national icon. "We believe the best approach to addressing the long-term issues facing coffee growers is through a 'coffee sustainability' program," remarks David Morelli, director of public affairs for Tim Hortons, Inc. "Our goal is to get farmers' coffee to market at the best time and for the best price, while emphasizing the need to respect and protect the environment."

Unfortunately, says Paula Barrios, research analyst for Shareholder Association for Research & Education (SHARE), coffee sustainability programs do not compare to the benefits offered by fair trade certification.

"It is very difficult to verify their effectiveness," she explains, "since those programs usually involve a two-way relationship between coffee retailers and growers, with no third party certification involved. There is therefore no way of knowing whether, under such programs, farmers are getting a minimum fair price for their coffee, or whether key social (including labour), environmental and trading standards are being followed."

In contrast, she says, the Fair Trade system enjoys superior credibility worldwide, with third-party monitoring and certification at the core of the system. This fall, SHARE is joining forces with Hamilton's Gary Hawton, founder of Meritas Mutual Funds which owns shares in Tim Hortons, in order to challenge the coffee company to adopt a fair trade alternative.

Gary Hawton of Meritas Mutual Funds wants Tim Hortons to go fair trade.

"Our goal isn't to change the worst of performers, but the best, about an issue in which we'd like to see them take leadership," says Hawton from his Kitchener-based office. "We're not trying to air out Tim Hortons' dirty laundry; rather, we believe they're a leader in many other areas, and this is one area in which they've fallen behind."

Over the next year, Hawton and his Christ-centred business will challenge Tim Hortons through letters and conversations. He encourages Christian consumers to work alongside him, by educating themselves on fair trade and truly understanding the economics of the coffee market. "Don't just ask Tim Hortons for a fair trade alternative," he cautions. "Find out how much it will actually cost per cup, and express to your franchise that you'd be willing to pay a bit more for the assurance that the person who makes their living off the coffee is being paid a reasonable wage."

The average global wage is three dollars per day. No matter North America's financial struggles, they're nothing compared to those facing 90-95 percent of the world each day.

"I can afford to pay another dime for my double-double," says Hawton, "to make sure that the person who worked hard to make my coffee can send his kids to school. These are our global neighbours, and we are incredibly blessed to know them."

Emily Wierenga is an author, artist and freelance writer who drinks fair trade coffee and lives with her husband and son in Blyth, ON. For more information, please visit www.emilywierenga.com.

Swallows overhead and teacher overmuch

Flowers & Thistles
Curt Gesch

Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise. (Ecclesiastes 7:16)

Cliff swallows

The other day someone asked me if I knew how to discourage cliff swallows from building colonies of nests in the peak of his house. Both of us are bird-lovers, specifically lovers of insect-eating swallows, but cliff swallows above windows leave mud and crud all over the windows, screens, and siding. Cliff swallows are welcome – even desired – on John's barns, but are a bit much on the house.

I checked out a number of websites and found several potential ways of discouraging cliff swallows from nesting on houses. I checked a blog and found that a lot of people didn't know cliff swallows – which nest in colonies and make gourd-shaped mud nests – from barn swallows – which nest singly and make cup-shaped mud and spittle nests, usually in barns, sheds, porches and so on.

Many "commentators" on the blog were aghast that anyone would ever, ever, ever wish to discourage swallows. "They are part of nature/creation/the world spirit" (multiple choice). Most of these earnest commentators were actually talking about barn swallows which might nest on a porch or a beam in the carport.

*****

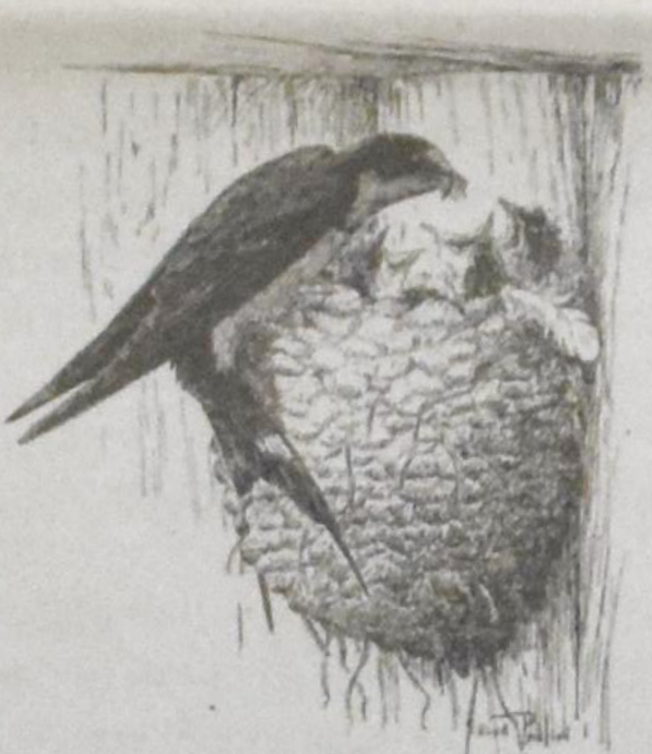
I once pontificated about barn swallows, too. I was teaching at Fraser Valley Christian High School in Surrey, B.C. and wrote an editorial for a newsletter about swallows, Christian education, and Psalm 84.

At that time, I was teaching a bird unit in a general science class and – as spring arrived – I heard lots of students say things like this: "Oh, my dad is so mad at those swallows making nests on the porch...." And this: "My mom knocks the nest down every time they try to make one."

I, too, was appropriately aghast. Barn swallows are easy to manage: Wait until they make a nest and then attach a small piece of plywood on the wall just underneath the nest to "catch the crap." After the nesting season, take the plywood and nest down, scrub away at the wall if that is your wont, and you have managed to co-exist with barn swallows, benefited from their insect-eating, and avoided daily encounters with bits of mud, feathers, and swallow dung.

*****

So I wrote. A student illustrated the editorial with a drawing of a barn swallow approaching a nest and babies. And I continued on to suggest that if Psalm 84 is accurate, then there were swallows living *in God's courts*. If God could tolerate swallows at his altars (smelly, bloody places anyway), perhaps we need to think twice before we complain too much about barn swallow nests in our homes and buildings.



Barn swallows

Of course, I added some other very profound insights about creation, God, worship, the temple, and so on. I think I was really writing mostly about the swallows, however; more precisely, about people's attitudes towards barn swallows. You can be sure that I was quite earnest in my approach.

The newsletter went home and, a day or so later, I received a telephone call from Frank de Vries, master teacher and principal of Vancouver Christian School.

"Gesch," said Frank, "you wrote a nice piece about swallows. You remind me of Tobit."

"Tobit?" I queried.

"In the Apocrypha. You know it, don't you? You can look it up in your Apocrypha." I must have sounded puzzled, perhaps even hurt. Why hadn't he mentioned the main point of the editorial? I didn't have an Apocrypha: Did this mean I was still too narrow theologically? I exhaled a "thank you," and hung up.

A little later, Frank called back, apparently having noticed my puzzlement and possible hurt feelings. He said, "Here, I'll read you the verse."

And he did. Listen, gentle readers, to the wisdom of Tobit 2:9-10a, shared by Rabbi Frank:

That night, after bathing myself, I went into my courtyard and lay down to sleep by the courtyard wall, leaving my face uncovered because of the heat. I did not know that there were sparrows in the wall above me, and their droppings fell, still warm, right into my eyes and produced white patches. I went to the doctors to be cured, but the more they treated me with their ointments, the more my eyes became blinded by the white patches, until I lost my sight.

Of course, it was the nasty sparrows, not the barn swallows, but I was properly chastened. To this day, when I find myself getting carried away with this or that decision I remember Tobit, and my eyes begin to sting.

My wise friend, Steffen, says, "Be a fanatic, but not too much of a fanatic."

I can imagine the Preacher adding one more clause to Ecclesiastes 7:16, "Be not earnest over-much, either." And I can imagine Tobit saying, "Don't sleep beneath sparrows."

When a swallow tries to make the nest on an old-fashioned light bulb, you may have to suggest that he/she moves on. I used to make little ledges in corners that were in lower-traffic areas to give them the idea that some places were more conducive to peaceful co-existence than others.

I carefully omitted mention of the sparrows which are the same species as the aggressive house sparrows some American brought to the New World, to the detriment of bluebirds and other native species. (This type of omission is sometimes called "proactive deletion exegesis," useful when one doesn't want to consider an entire text. I excel at this activity.)

Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) has recently completed his term on the Calvin Theological Seminary Board of Trustees. He notes that house sparrows have built a nest behind the red fire alarm on the exterior of the seminary building, rendering it ineffective.

Church news

CRC, RCA church planters 'catch the wave'

ORLANDO, Florida (CRCNA) – More than 150 church planters and other leaders from both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America gathered in Orlando, Florida, recently to focus on growing new churches together.

The two-day "Catch the Wave" pre-conference took place immediately prior to the Exponential church planting conference, which attracted more than 3,000 church planters from across North America.

Church planters in attendance at the pre-conference participated in worship, training sessions, small group learning events and networking with parenting churches. The conference ended with a visit from Amway founder Richard DeVos, who challenged the two denominations to work together closely to bring the Gospel to more people.

"Catch the Wave," which was co-sponsored by the Christian Reformed Home Missions Church Planting and Development team and the RCA Church Multiplication team, was designed to spark the passion of churches to plant other churches.

"For both the CRC and RCA, this is a calling from God that many churches are hearing and asking to be further equipped," said Tim Vink, coordinator of Church Multiplication, Reformed Church in America. "We know that when a church plants another church directly, there is a very high rate of success, over 90 percent. Churches planting churches allows a true multiplying and sending movement to grow exponentially over time."

First formal joint gathering

While the CRC and RCA have been collaborating on church planting for some time, the conference marked the first formal gathering of church planters and parenting churches from both denominations.

"This kind of event accelerates the mutual learning and deeper relationships," Vink says. "Our intent is to show that in our unity, we are stronger with Gospel impact, that our cooperating helps both denominations hear the call, keep the courage, learn the competencies, and coach one another to far more church planting success."

The conference began with a worship service led by RCA church planter Rev. Mike Hayes, who leads an urban church plant in San Francisco. Hayes also led one of the conference's most popular group sessions, which was focused on the pros and cons of urban church planting.

The event also helped people openly discuss their fears about starting new ministries and parenting new churches. Throughout the conference, CRC and RCA church planters and parent churches told stories about their experiences multiplying new churches.

Another area of focus at the conference's group learning sessions was the planting of ethnically diverse congregations. A session on multicultural churches initiated lively discussion among church planters about language barriers, cultural nuances, and immigration.

Also emphasized was working in clusters, which are groups of churches and leaders located in the same geographic region. Church planter Randy Rowland, who leads Sanctuary CRC, a Home Missions-sponsored church in Seattle, Washington, led the session on clusters. Both denominations are developing clusters, which are creating gospel movements and developing diverse, mission-minded leaders.

"We loved being together," says Vink. "We laughed and worshipped and prayed and learned together, one family of God. And according to Psalm 133, God commands a blessing where we dwell together in unity. I believe we all felt that favor from our Lord."

Archbishop denounces war between 'modern man' and 'man as created by God'

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (CNA) – Catholic Archbishop Emeritus Carmelo Juan Giaquinta of Resistencia, Argentina, says the world today is witnessing a "war between the modern man and man as created by God." Christians must "come to the defense of the dignity and distinction of the sexes, marriage and the family," he says.

During a sermon earlier this month, the Archbishop noted that "with the fall of Communism, many thought there would be a resurgence of the Christian faith and an era of peace and of true religious freedom." The West "offered the countries of the East and the entire world the same fundamental human realities assumed and defended by Christianity. That is: the distinction between the sexes ... marriage and the family."

"Today a true war has been unleashed between modern man and man as created by God, in order to recreate him, not according to the divine image, but according to his image," the Archbishop said. "This is the motive behind efforts to idolatrize the word 'discrimination,' and then use it against the natural distinction of the sexes, against marriage between man and woman and against the family composed of a father, mother and children."

"Christians must root out all violence," he continued, "lest they be overcome by the evil they wish to combat. Verbal violence and all types of physical violence are weapons unworthy of a Christian."

"Christians must do good, as members of the Church and as citizens of this world," Giaquinta continued. "As members of the Church, they must offer heartfelt prayers for all those who contradict the Gospel or defame the Church. As citizens of this world, they have the grave duty to actively participate in the defense and promotion of the common good and for this reason they must come to the defense of the dignity and distinction of the sexes, marriage and the family."

Canadian CRC office focuses on indigenous groups

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – The Christian Reformed Church in North America's Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) is encouraging Canadian congregations to participate in the proceedings of the government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on Indian Residential Schools.

Over the next five years the commission will hold events to document the perspectives of survivors of residential schools, to promote healing, and to encourage a new relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Canada.

TRC Commissioners and Indigenous leaders have told the CCG directly that the participation of all churches and all Canadians is critical for the process of truth and reconciliation. For this reason the CRC in Canada and the CCG are hoping that church members will attend TRC events and take steps for local reconciliation too – by building relationships with First Nations people and communities.

The CCG's suggestion to church members comes on the heels of a recent request by the TRC that the 9th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues host an international Roundtable discussion on truth commissions within the next two years.

"We know that there are as many as 50 countries around the world that have operated, or are planning similar Commissions," said The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, TRC Chair. "This is an opportune time to have an international discussion on these processes so that we can share and learn about experiences of practices that work best."

CCG itself is working with CRC and ecumenical partners to develop a renewed understanding of Canada's treaty responsibilities. "Our Indigenous friends tell us that treaties are a sacred covenant. We need to learn more from them and to work with them for justice and reconciliation," says Mike Hogeterp, research and communications manager for CCG.

Addressing human rights violations

"Truth commissions" are generally established as truth-seeking bodies to address past human rights violations. They are officially sanctioned temporary bodies that centre on those who have been victimized. The process helps a country come to terms with its past in order to move forward, says a TRC news release.

"What might we non-Indigenous people gain by taking a fresh and appreciative look at how indigenous peoples look at life and the world? They, too, are created 'in the image of God' and hence enrich the diversity of creation," writes John Valk, a former member of CCG and professor of worldview studies at the University of New Brunswick. "Their deep understanding of our dependence on and connection to the earth can open our eyes to the destructive ways of the West that even we so readily embrace. Their sense of community, of ritual, mirrors ours, yet can also teach us much."

Valk's comments appear in an article titled "The Gift of Indigeneity," which is on the CCG website. "Though not without their shortcomings," writes Valk, "they too struggle to live authentic lives in relationship with the Creator."

Hogeterp says he finds Valk's piece to be important because it points to a basic message: that the assimilation

CANADIAN PRESS

Murray Sinclair (second from L) participates in a healing ceremony in 2009.

practices that are part of the history of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people "have not only devastated indigenous communities, they've robbed our society of potentially rich contributions of the First Peoples in this place called North America."

In addition to asking the United Nations to hold a roundtable discussion on truth commissions within two years, TRC of Canada told the UN last week that it supports efforts that are underway to see an International Declaration on a Decade of Reconciliation. "This Declaration would be seen as a significant gesture of reconciliation among Indigenous Peoples throughout the global community," said TRC commissioner Marie Wilson.

"The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's mandate is to inform all Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools. The TRC wants to document the truth of survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected by the Indian residential schools experience. The TRC will guide and inspire Indigenous Peoples and Canadians in a process of reconciliation and renewed relationships that are based on mutual understanding and respect," says the TRC news release.

Additional information on the TRC is available at <www.trc.ca> and on the CCG website (<www.crcna.org/pages/ccg.cfm>).

Church news

Obama urged to fill vacant religious-freedom ambassador post

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TCP) – A growing number of lawmakers, scholars and human rights groups in recent days have warned U.S. President Obama that he is sending a dangerous message to foreign governments by failing to appoint an Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom.

After more than a year in office Obama has not filled the position which was first created by law in 1998. Lawmakers, many from the president's own political party, as well as foreign policy experts, say the empty position sends the message that the issue of religious freedom is not important to the United States.

"The absence of senior level leadership in your administration on this critical issue is of grave and urgent concern," said a March 30 letter from a diverse group of scholars, policy thinkers and religious freedom activists organized by Freedom House.

The signers not only urged Obama to immediately fill the position but encouraged the president to elevate the ambassador's position so that the person reports directly to the Secretary of State, as do other ambassadors-at-large.

"Religious freedom is foundation to American democracy, our Constitution, and the long, nonpartisan history of American promotion of human rights," reads the letter. "Likewise, international human rights laws…stipulate robust commitments to 'freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.'"

The Freedom House letter followed a March 25, bipartisan letter sent by members of Congress that similarly emphasized the importance of the religious freedom position.

Bipartisan agreement

Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.) and Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II (D-Mo.), co-chairs of the U.S. House of Representative's International Religious Freedom Caucus, along with 16 other House members, signed the letter. "Our voice is critical for those who have none, which is why the need for an Ambassador is so urgent," the bipartisan group of lawmakers said. Religious freedom will lead to greater human freedom, economic prosperity and security around the world, they asserted.

A recent Pew Forum study revealed that 70 percent of the world's population lives in countries where there are severe restrictions on religious freedom.

"Religious freedom – the right to believe, or not, and to live and act on the basis of belief – goes to the very heart of what it means to be human," wrote Thomas Farr, former American diplomat and senior fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, in a commentary published recently on *The Washington Post* website. "To the extent we can succeed in reducing this kind of abuse, and promoting this kind of freedom, we are advancing social justice and human dignity."

Farr, like other foreign policy experts, say greater religious freedom in the world would improve U.S. national security. He said the idea of promoting religious freedom and understanding in the world is not "a fantasy of the Christian right," pointing to the diverse group of individuals, including liberal Democrats, who have supported it.

Regimes that are more democratic and that seek to provide for the "economic, social, intellectual, and religious well being" of its citizens "are far less likely to incubate, nourish and export religion-based terrorism," Farr contended. Considering the many religious conflicts around the world, foreign policy experts highlight, it is imperative that the U.S. work with religious communities in its counterinsurgency strategy and appoint an Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom.

Comedy Central delights in bashing Christians says Catholic lay leader

NEW YORK (CNA) – In response to reports that the cable television channel Comedy Central is considering running a cartoon series on Jesus Christ, a Roman Catholic lay leader has charged that the controversial network delights "in bashing Christians," and recalled Comedy Central's recent efforts to ensure the removal content offensive to Muslims.

The proposed half hour episodes of the show "JC" depict Christ as a "regular guy" who moves to New York to get away from "his father's enormous shadow," Fox News reported. The dad is portrayed as a powerful but apathetic character who prefers playing video games rather than talking to his son.

Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, issued a statement two weeks ago condemning the slated series.

Donohue recalled a recent incident during which the creators of *South Park*, a show that airs on Comedy Central, came under fire by Islamic group "Revolution Muslim" for featuring content in their show that took jabs at the Prophet Muhammad. Comedy Central censored the *South Park* episode on television and did not permit it to be shown on the network's website, wrote the *New York Times* on April 22.

Donohue then quoted Comedy Central network official Kent Alterman, who, in reference to the "JC" show said, "In general, comedy in its purest form always makes some people uncomfortable."

"Not true," Donohue countered. "Besides the fact that there is no end to the number of comedians who have made a huge name for themselves without ever offending anyone, what is even more relevant is the fact that Comedy Central has absolutely no interest in making Muslims feel uncomfortable."

"But maybe they're wrong," he added. "Muslims regard Jesus to be a prophet and hold him in high regard. They may not be too pleased to learn that one of their revered figures is going to be ridiculed on Comedy Central."

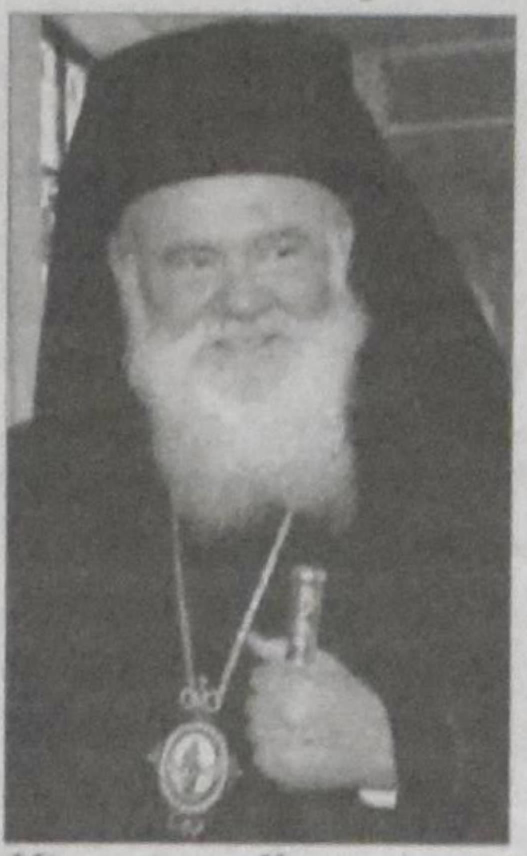
Donohue suggested that Catholics contact Comedy Central CEO Doug Herzog in order to "dialogue" on the proposed show.

"If you show up at Herzog's office, and he says he is feeling uneasy, let him know that having a fun time in its purest form always makes some people feel uncomfortable," Donohue concluded. "He is sure to understand."

Greece: State church stands by Greeks in tough times

ATHENS, Greece (WCC) – The Church of Greece is ready to assist the Greek people to face the consequences of tough economic measures taken by the government, a church official has said.

The Archbishop of Athens and All Greece and Primate of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Greece, Hieronymos II, met on May 4 with the country's Prime Minister George Papandreou to express the church's willingness to support the Greek people during the difficult times ahead, said Rev. Fr Gabriel Papanicolaou. A church official, Papanicolaou attended the May 4-6 gathering of churches' ecumenical officers in Geneva organized by the World Council of Churches.



Hieronymos II

"The church is ready to assist in any possible way," said Papanicolaou. "We know that the consequences of the measures will be more strongly felt after the summer, so we are getting ready, training parish priests to deal with the crisis."

On May 5 three people died in the Greek capital Athens during a firebomb attack against a bank at the height of massive trade union protests. The previous day, Greek civil servants had shut down schools and hospitals and disrupted flights as they protested against additional wage cuts and tax increases unveiled by the government that week.

According to news reports, as a consequence of the "austerity" measures, the Greek economy is forecast to shrink four percent this year and 2.6 percent in 2011. Unemployment has risen to 11.3 percent, a six-year high.

Most Greeks members of state church

The Church of Greece has a membership of about 10 million in a country whose population is about 11 million. Archbishop Hieronymos urged "unity, strength and optimism."

"As a church we need to bring hope to the people," Papanicolaou said. "But we also are preparing to supply food, clothes and other relief items, as well as to care for the needs of the people who lose their jobs and assist them with pastoral and psychological attention."

"This isn't just an economic or financial crisis," said Papanicolaou, "but also a crisis of values." For Papanicolaou, consumerism and greed push people to covet more and more, spending without limits. "We need to recover the spirit of humbleness," he added.

According to news reports, Greece's contracting economy and increasing budget gap has fueled investors' concerns about the country's ability to service its debt. Therefore, borrowing costs reached the highest level since before the introduction of the euro currency in 1999.

Papandreou's austerity measures aim to bring the shortfall within the European Union limit of three percent in 2014. In order to achieve that, he has called on Greeks to endure sacrifices in return for an unprecedented 110 billion euro bailout from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund.

The unpopular government measures include wage cuts for public workers, a three-year freeze on pensions, and increases in sales taxes and the prices of fuel, alcohol and tobacco.

Dr Rogate Mshana, WCC director of Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation, says, "If there are no changes, this system can only produce debt crisis, financial bubbles and economic crashes.... Now there is fear of a contagion effect spreading from Greece to other European countries and some are trying to prevent this from happening by localizing the problem. However, it is a structural problem that cannot be solved by the current bailout and austerity measures."

Pensioners riot outside the Premier's office in Athens to protest the new austerity measures.

Columns

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

A father's grief

The words "let me know what we can do to help!", or a friendly pat on the shoulder as they walk by leave me gulping down my grief, on the verge of exploding in tears and wailing. I notice my wife sitting amongst women, in a circle, no one really saying anything; rather, they are just sitting, embracing my wife, as tears ebb down her face. I stand off to the side, alone, taking in the sight of her, shedding the tears for our babies, the ones we won't hold in our arms, the ones we won't watch take their first step, say their first word, graduate, marry, birth their own children.

I stand alone, an occasional glance, a pat on the back, a nod in my direction. I stand, a pillar, a shadow. Maybe I am overly sensitive, maybe I care too much. Maybe my heart is too big. What I do know is that my sense of loss is huge. I have always dreamed of having a large family, many children. My own and those whom I would take in. Through my own decisions I walked away for 10 years. I was in my 30s. I walked away from a time when many people are planning children. I was absorbed in my own life, getting my own needs met. Now, I long to see my wife birth. I long to see her beam as she holds our children in her arms. I long to hold them in my arms, against my chest, so they know they are safe, secure. I long to wipe their tears, teach them to pray.

Grief. A father's grief, often forgotten. Comfort the mother, the wife, as the man stands off, a shadow of what he used to be.

A painful lesson

I have learnt from watching, and learnt from my grief, what not to do. Maybe that's what God is doing. Maybe God is showing me what not to say, what not to do. I know that I can shelter my pain, hide it away from people, because if I let it go it would look messy, unattractive, unappealing. Maybe it is my own pride that stands in the way of my own grief.

I have made it to the place where anger and sadness are friends. I have made it to the place where I realize my own vulnerabilities, and need to move it to the next rung of the ladder. I need to lay it down. I can't carry it anymore. I can't carry the burden any longer. No matter where you are in the journey, grief stinks, grief is debilitating, yet grief is a way of saying, you have a heart, you feel, you are alive, you are human. I have said, and continue to say to people, that it is important to grieve and to walk that through in a variety of different ways. Now, I stand in a different area of grief, the loss of children and the loss of dreams and the loss of what could have been.

I am challenged to find the words that I have spoken to others, and put that into practice. I have found that I need to go to the cross. I need to go to my Heavenly Papa, and give it to him, to go to him, for comfort and support and for my refuge.

It's not okay

I can say, it will be okay, and I can see it being okay; yet right now, it's not okay. I am not okay. I am a mess. I am not together and I don't care that I am not. My mind wanders. I forget. I can forget what I did the night before. I don't care to phone someone and tell them how I am doing. I don't care to continually make excuses for my lack of enthusiasm, or lack of energy. I could sleep all day. That is grief. I am tired of apologizing for my lack of leadership and tired of explaining that I am feeling like I am going to crack up at any given time. I am tired of not crying, and feeling angry. Some days that is how I feel.

Some days, I feel joy, happiness, and believe it will be all okay. I sometimes have hope that we will carry to term, and I will one day hold babies in my arms, babies who are a part of me and part of my wife. I still dream of that, I still long for that. I can be present, I can be focused, I can minister to others; yet I also know my vulnerability in the change of direction that I can go. It could be a reminder of fatherhood, it could be a picture, a thought, an image. It could be just the emptiness in my arms and heart. I am okay with not being okay. I just wish sometimes that others would be okay with it too.

Painting by Melanie Pyke (www.melpyke.com) Psalm 68: Father to the Fatherless

This was written in 2008 after my wife and I miscarried for the second time. One of the grieving processes that I have learnt was that even in the midst of new experiences, such as giving birth, the loss of babies through miscarriage is still one that has deeply impacted me as a father. I was motivated to share this piece after hearing about two couples in our lives who just recently experienced loss and the importance of hearing a father's heart in response to miscarriage.

Kenny Warkentin (paintpent@mts.net) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist.

Patchwork Words
Melissa Kuipers

Apologizing for sins of the past with lives in the present

"Missions? How do you study that?" she said sharply, brows suddenly furrowed accusingly. I had just met this young woman at our hostel kitchen in Barcelona, and already, over the scent of my slowly warming spaghetti sauce, I could smell a debate coming on.

I had been making small-talk with a group of people while heating my supper, and I was being asked the typical "what do you do" type questions when she walked in.

"I'm in university," I had answered.

"And what do you study?"

I could say just English. Of course, it makes me look more cultured if I throw in the Art History minor. Of course, it makes me more honest if I say missions as well. So I said all three. That's where she jumped in.

"Well," I replied calmly to her harsh question, trying to think of an explanation that wouldn't sound like Christianized jargon, "I go to a Christian university, and the missions program basically looks at the relationship between religion and culture."

"Really?" she pressed with growing cynicism. "I didn't know there was a relationship there."

I gasped a little on the steam from the boiling pasta and tried my best to appear confident. "Yes – a pretty big one," I said, staring at the stove.

"A Christian university? That couldn't be unbiased."

This woman was not afraid of confrontation, I was realizing quickly.

"Yes, it's biased," I said slowly; "as much as a secular one would be."

"You know, I just learned what that word meant!" her boyfriend interjected cheerfully, politely trying to steer the conversation away from the attacking tone in which she was leading. Shoot, I thought, realizing I'd succumbed to Christian lingo by using the 's' word.

"Well," she continued, undeterred, "I hate missionaries."

"Do you?" I said casually.

"Yes. I studied anthropology in college, and missionaries have done a lot of crap to other cultures and nations."

"Yeah. I have to admit that they have. And that's part of what we study."

"Well, maybe when you're done at your 'Christian university,' you should pick up some anthropology classes."

She sat down then, satisfied.

The story not told

Before taking a History of Missions course, I was expecting to hear more of the stories I had heard growing up, timeless legends of romanticized 18th- and 19th-century heroes of the faith who had boldly gone where no Christian has gone before and brought the good saving news to nations who had lived in utter darkness. I was not prepared for the controversial issues we would encounter when it came to discussing the ways in which we had fallen short of our Great Commission time and time again. I had previously only heard murmurs here and there of the damage that had been done in the name of Christ, the Crusades and the effects of Western Colonialism always being the first to come up; but I felt it commonly understood that every nation and religion and epoch of history has a few bad eggs. Besides, those were people who lived long ago and were no longer connected to us today.

However, throughout my university experience, I realized how much our faith is shaped by Christianity's past, how the body of Christ does not simply span the global village we live in today, but spans time and history. That history, as with all of creation, comes with beauty, and also comes fallen. And in a 21st-century setting where many are looking back with demanding questions to a time of colonialism, we are asked to give account for that history.

I believe that today we cannot avoid atrocities that have been committed (and are still being committed) in the name of Christ. We cannot merely carry on the gospel message and hope others dissociate us from "those other people" who do crazy things and aren't nice like us. We have a responsibility to face the critiques of Christianity we may feel bombarded by. We need to:

1. **Apologize.** Admitting to mistakes done in our history demonstrates our recognition of our fallenness, and brings a humility required in order to open dialogue.
2. **Demonstrate change.** There is a distinction between Western political agenda and Good News proclamation. We need to demonstrate that the Church today has recognized the distinction.
3. **Dialogue.** We need to be willing to discuss the issues we are accused of instigating, to listen to sides of the story that have been silenced in the past.
4. **Take an approach of humble confidence.** While we recognize that all we will do is tainted, we believe that the gospel is truly good news, is the word of life.

And now that I've created four concise points, let me say I don't think it's as easy as that. I wish that the above conversation, as well as most discussions I've shared with non-Christians, went differently. But the reality is we have made mistakes in the past, and we will continue to in the future, even in the act of trying to redeem our own witness. And that's where the continuing redemption of Christ comes into our message.

Melissa Kuipers (mckuip@gmail.com) lives in St. Catharines and teaches English at a Christian high school. She co-leads a club called The Justice League.

Debate

Belhar Confession debated

Part VI

Can this confession be applied to other issues besides racism and apartheid? Can it be used to argue for homosexuality, against abortion, or give direction with regards to divisions in the church? What unintended consequences can you imagine?

In 1982, a Reformed church in Belhar, a suburb of Cape Town in South Africa, wrote a confession of faith that focused on social justice issues that arose around apartheid. Since then, the Belhar Confession has been accepted by some African and European Reformed churches as equal to the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt and the Heidelberg Catechism. In July, the Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) accepted it as a fourth confession and the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) voted by 72% to propose the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity at Synod 2012.

Christian Courier asked Dr. John Bolt and Shiao Chong to respond to the Belhar's consideration by answering six questions posed by the editorial team. This is the final question.

John Bolt

This set of questions can be called the slippery slope concern and is a dangerous kind of argument that needs to be handled cautiously. Fear of what *might* be is not sufficient reason to oppose the Belhar or any other statement or policy. One *could* take any document, even the Canons of Dordt, and extend its application beyond the issue that gave rise to it. Is an extension true to the spirit and intent of the original and reasonably justified by it or simply an example of anxiety run wild?

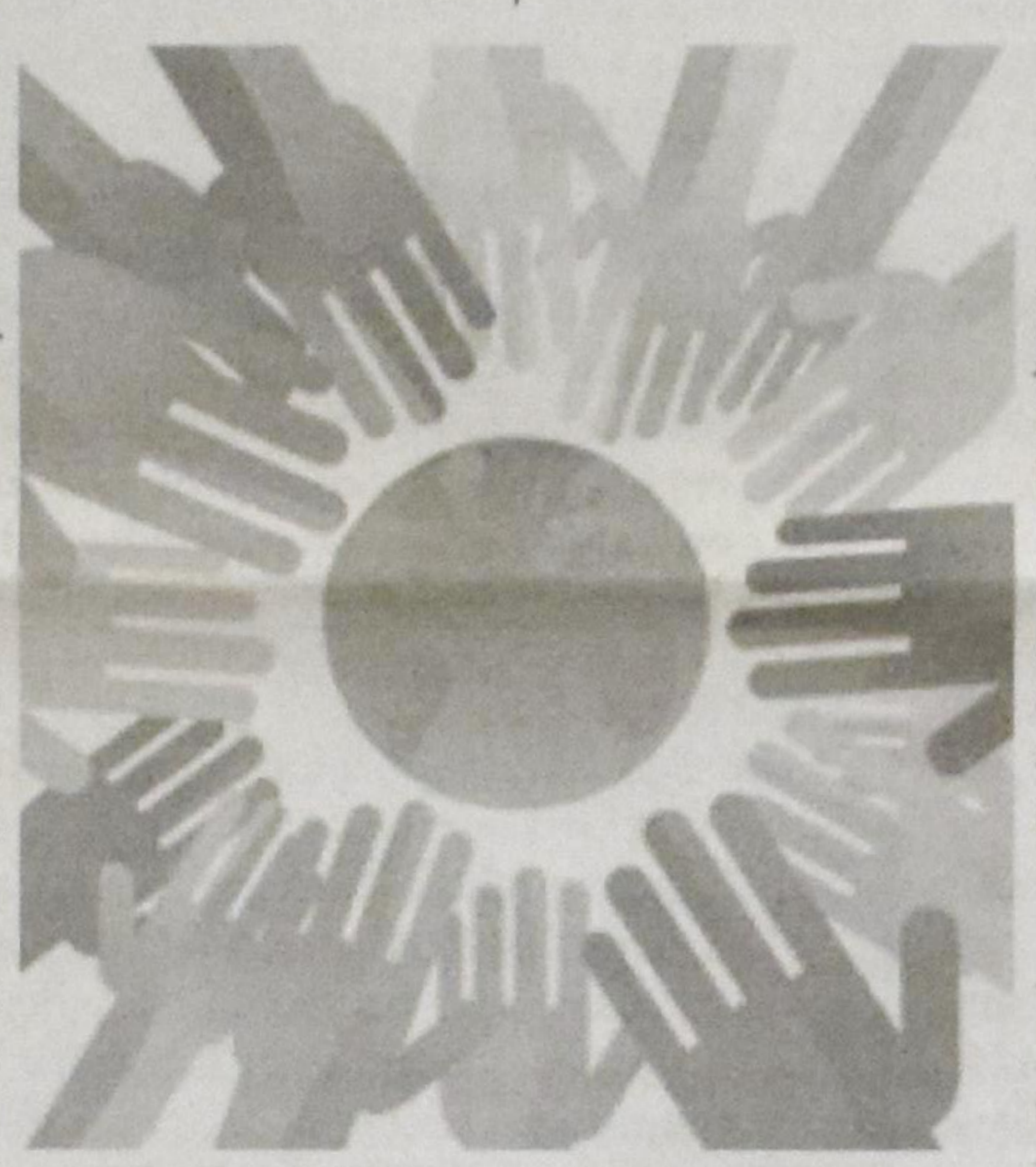
With the Belhar we have some historical facts to guide us. In October 2008, the Rev. Allan Boesak, a member of the original drafting committee for the Belhar, appealed to it in a recommendation to the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa that she fully accept all homosexuals in loving and faithful relationships as eligible for the offices of the church. Recently (April 26, 2010) Boesak told an audience at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary that "the Belhar Confession doesn't even mention racial differences until late in the document." The prime declaration, he said, is that "true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership in the church." According to Boesak, the Belhar was never meant to be just an anti-apartheid document, but a document against discrimination of all kinds. (From the Louisville *Courier-Journal*; online at http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20100426/NEWS01/4260376/1008/Apartheid%2Bfoe%2BBoesak%2Bspeaks%2Bto%2BLouisville%2BPresbyterians).

Now, the synod of the URCSA did not agree, and Boesak left the synod meeting and resigned from all his church positions. Undoubtedly, this was a key reason why the CRC synod, when it presented the Belhar to the church for adoption as a fourth confession in the summer of 2009, included the following statement:

"Synod further observes that, as a faithful witness of Scripture, the Belhar does not negate the biblically derived statements of Synod on homosexuality, including those of 1973 and 1996. (*2009 Acts of Synod*, art. 59; p. 606)"

A tricky notion

So, who is right, the author or the interpreter? Let's go to the Belhar itself and ask whether Boesak's take on homosexuality is plausible or not. The fourth article, recall, uses as its basic ethical principle the liberationist notion that God "is in a special way on the side of the poor and the oppressed." Over the years, ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) *have* used this guideline to support Castro's revolution, the Palestinian cause against Israel, countless other leftist political movements, socialism against capitalism, environmental radicalism, and yes, the ordination of practicing gays and lesbians. So, in spite of the CRC synodical assurances, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the Belhar could be used to defend the ordination of practicing homosexuals as an oppressed and marginalized group. If the principle of "siding with the oppressed" is the key to social justice, why not apply it to any group that claims to be a victim of oppression, including practicing homosexuals?



While I do not want to participate in slippery-slope fear-mongering and want to honour the good intentions of synod's 2009 statement, I do not see any good reason to doubt Boesak's own understanding and to deny the validity of his extending the moral reasoning of the Belhar beyond matters of race. Perhaps a brief consideration of a different extension by WARC itself might be illuminating here.

Oversimplication

Only a few years after the Belhar was adopted by the URCSA (in 1989), WARC called its member churches to enter into "a covenant for justice," given "the threats to life in our age, for the sake of the whole creation, the future of all humanity, and especially for the children and young people of the planet." The process then begun eventually became known as "Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth" and led eventually to the Accra Confession of 2004. Along the way, in the consultation process, WARC heard a plea from African churches "that the current global economy be declared as antithetical to the Christian faith in a manner similar to the confessing churches' historical stance against Nazism and apartheid. (A reference to the Barmen

See **Bolt** *page 21*

Shiao Chong

I suspect this is the greatest motivating factor behind most people's objections to the Belhar. People are afraid of how the Belhar could be used to argue in support of certain "political" agendas. One of its authors, Dr. Allan Boesak, has used the Belhar to argue for same-sex marriages and ordaining practicing homosexuals. Even Dr. Richard Mouw, for instance, has objected to the Belhar based on this reason. Many fear that almost any political cause, from anti-Israel to anti-rich, could be supported under the Belhar's emphasis on social justice. The Belhar is perceived as a thinly veiled political tool clothed in theological language. So if we adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession, are we letting a wolf into the sheep pen?

First of all, any written document is subject to being used or abused in ways that may or may not be intended originally. Just look at the Bible, for instance. The Bible has been used to justify violence, war, discrimination, slavery, polygamy and apartheid, among many other things. Silence or gaps in the Three Forms of Unity were used to justify separate tables for Lord's Supper between "whites" and "coloured". And, I suspect, our current three confessions have been abused to support other questionable practices in the past, either by the CRC or by other denominations. Do we simply reject these documents as theologically ambiguous, inadequate or suspect because of these uses and abuses? Such uses cannot be the reason for rejecting or accepting theological documents. The reasons should be whether the documents are truthful.

Interdependent documents

I strongly suggest that the Belhar should always be interpreted in dialogue with the other three confessions. In fact, all the confessions should be interpreted in light of each other. They are not a doctrinal smorgasbord for us to pick and choose parts we like. They are more like a combo platter – we buy into the whole package or not at all. For that reason, I don't see the Belhar as a stand-alone document but as a supplementary confession. The Belhar, in this way, is like the Canons of Dordt, which "have a limited character in that they do not cover the whole range of doctrine, but focus on the five points of doctrine in dispute".[1] Hence, its usefulness is more in expanding and applying doctrinal truths already covered or hinted at in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. If people think this lack of theological comprehensiveness is a reason to downgrade the Belhar, then what do we do with the Canons of Dordt, which also lack doctrinal comprehensiveness? If we are to be Christians with integrity, we need to be consistent and fair in how we apply our judgments on all these documents.

Secondly, Allan Boesak is only one member of a steering committee who wrote the Belhar. One man's interpretation of the Belhar does not count as an authoritative interpretation. In fact, the whole committee (or Moderamen) wrote an accompanying letter to the Belhar, in which they state, "we do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes... We plead, therefore, that this confession would not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives."[2] I think it would be wise to include the accompanying letter as part of an introduction to the Belhar, if it is adopted. The CRC probably should also write its own preamble or framing introduction, along with footnotes at necessary sections of the Belhar, to provide the framework for a collective interpretation of it. It is the denomination's collective interpretation of any confession that ultimately matters.

And that is the case in the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa (URCSA) as they consider Dr. Boesak's report on homosexuality. The URCSA is giving time for its churches and presbyteries to read and study that report before making any decisions to reject or accept it, as Boesak's committee finished the report only weeks before its 2008 Synod, and only delegates received copies of it at that time. So, the URCSA is simply giving due diligence to Boesak's report, as they should.[3] The denomination is in the process of making its collective interpretation and decision on the matter.

Clouding the issue

For the record, the Belhar, in and of itself, does not affirm nor condemn homosexual practice. Nowhere does it even mention homosexuality. We should not stoop to

See **Chong** *page 21*

2010 Festival of Faith & Writing

Every other year, Calvin College creates a vibrant community where people come together to discuss, celebrate, and explore the ways in which faith is represented in literature and how it plays out in our world today.

Dara Horn on free will, epic decisions and the original Jewish Internet.

Angela Reitsma Bick

Dara Horn, 32, has a PhD. in comparative literature from Harvard and was named one of *Granta* magazine's Best Young American Novelists in 2007. Her novel *The World to Come* won the 2006 Jewish Book Award for fiction. This interview was part of Horn's eleventh stop on a busy spring tour to promote her most recent novel, *All Other Nights*, which takes place during the US Civil War. Dara Horn lives with her husband and their three children in New Jersey.

Which authors have influenced your work?

Horn: All languages have a religious legacy built into them, even if you don't consciously realize it. English's legacy is from the Hebrew Bible. I try to emulate the Hebrew and Yiddish writers by writing for a secular audience with language tied to the Hebrew Bible.

Can you give an example from *All Other Nights*?

Horn: I modeled the main character after the patriarch in Genesis – Jacob. The Biblical Jacob is really interesting because he changes. At the beginning of his life, he tricks his brother, lies to his father and does whatever his mother tells him to do, but by the end of the story he's worthy to become the leader of a nation. In ancient literature, it's rare for a character to change.

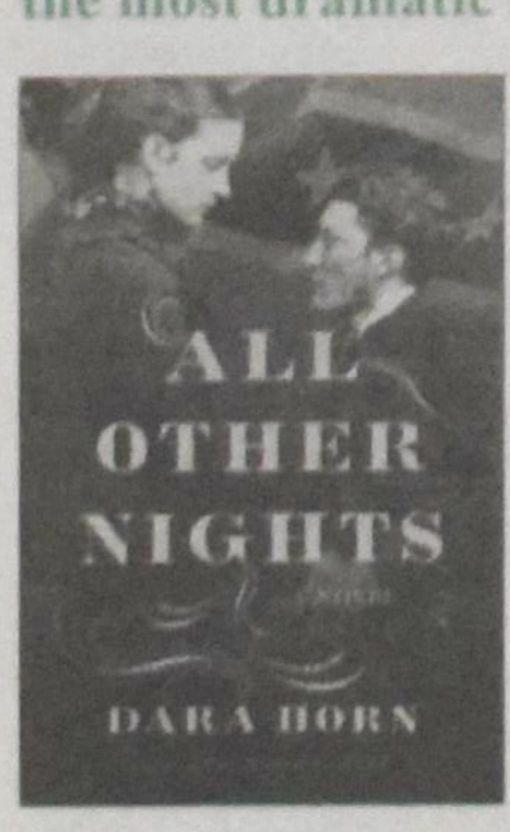
In *All Other Nights*, Jacob also flees his father's house, goes to his uncle's house in a foreign land, commits a crime against his uncle, gets mixed up with a set of sisters, devotes himself to a new family, gets into a fight with a man who may represent his conscience, ends up with a limp for the rest of his life and so on. His character gradually changes.

Does that contradict the line which alludes to the title of the book: "What you allow to happen on one night will happen on all other nights…?"

Horn: There's an ongoing debate about whether or not people can change. In a sense, this debate animated the Civil War – the idea of tradition vs. progress, whether a society can change. Jacob has to change to allow for the possibility of repentance.

Freedom is not just a physical but a mental state. In other words, it takes a real act of imagination to see that you can act beyond people's expectations of you. Jacob eventually appreciates the gift of American life and of all Jewish traditions – the gift of free will. Tonight doesn't have to be the same as all other nights.

Your books include details of Jewish life during some of the most dramatic historical moments of the past two centuries. Is it hard to balance the epic with the personal?



Horn: I think the epic is the personal. This is not a realistic book – as soon as there's a shoot-out at the wedding, that's a clue – because I like to keep people entertained, but also because I see plot as a way to elevate the story to a legendary level. It gives the characters a dramatic stage to act out the very real decisions that ordinary people make every day. Not many people are asked to kill their uncles, but they may be put in situations where they have to choose between family and the larger community. The betrayals are exaggerated, but the conflict is familiar.

Do you share Der Nister's belief [in *The World to Come*] that a story has to mean something?

Horn: A story doesn't have a choice but to mean something, [although] I also sympathize with the scepticism of art being redemptive. In Western culture, the Romantic movement emphasized that art can take the place of religion. But one of the central ideas in Judaism is the limitations of human creativity. Our ability to understand the world is limited, as God tells Job. That matches our limitations to capture the power of the world in art.

Angela Reitsma Bick (angela@christiancourier.ca) is co-editor of Christian Courier.

Why the Talmud is like the Internet

Do you think the Internet has affected the way we read?

Horn: People are very alarmist about the Internet, but changes [like this] have happened many times before. The change from scroll to book upset many Jews, because you read a scroll differently – you can't flip back to the beginning to see what happened. Discrepancies can't be checked easily.

You have another big transition with the printing press and again when more people became literate. Now, online, there are no barriers. The Talmud is 60 volumes with hundreds and hundreds of authors. Each page of Talmud has the central text in the middle of the page, and commentaries surround it. Judaism always had a global collective of scholarship, which now exists for everyone on the Internet (see *The Talmud and the Internet* by Jonathan Rosen).

Inklings of Avi

Angela Reitsma Bick

As a young child, Emily, "for reasons no one knows," called her twin brother Avi instead of his given name, Edward. Since then, it's been the only name he uses – with his family and as an author. Avi is an award-winning novelist for children and young adults, with his books (64) almost matching his years (72). He has won critical acclaim for *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, a best-selling adventure on the high seas, and *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, a Newberry Medal winner set in 14th century England.

Avi's work spans genres, time periods and styles. At Calvin's Festival of Faith and Writing in April, I heard Avi read excerpts from eight different pieces and realized what unites his writing: it's all *good*. It's easy to follow, often funny and with characters that feel like friends. It's not surprising that kids love Avi's books, which fill an entire shelf at my local public library and spill onto a second one. And even though those shelves are in the Junior section, adults can be seen lurking in the same aisle.

A credulous crowd

Avi says he likes writing for kids because "they're great readers. They absorb and reflect on the experience on their own terms." Kids can "not like your book but like you," which he appreciates.

"When a kid reads a book," he explains, "and they see something that measures their experience, their response is, 'How did the author know about me?' An adult reads a book, and says, 'There are other people like me.'" In that way, he argues, kids read more deeply than adults. And although he was honoured to receive a Newberry, Avi values the comments from children on his blog more than literary reviews.

The role of belief

The *Crispin* series depicts life in medieval England from a young boy's point of view. Crispin sees the hand of God in each of life's turns, whether as blessing or punishment. I asked Avi if it was difficult to write the thoughts of a character with such a strong religious worldview.

"I'm an atheist," Avi states bluntly. "At the same time, I'm perfectly aware that most people in the world profess a religious belief. To pretend that religion isn't important or that it doesn't have a lot to do with what people are doing is useless." He firmly believes that a writer who is not religious can write about people who are.

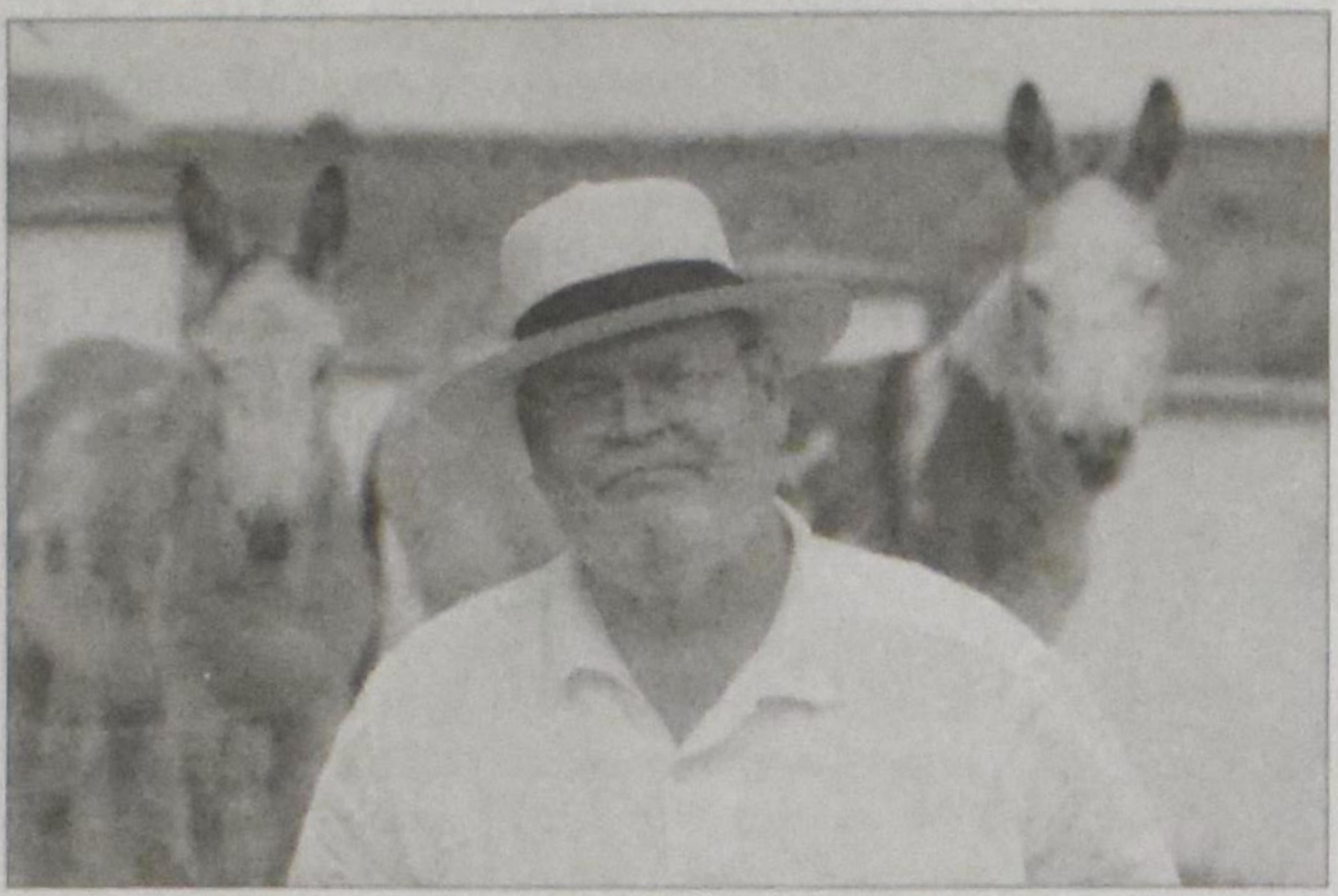
"'Real' historical fiction is not just the physical trappings," he says. "It's trying to convey how people feel about things."

Avi says he was drawn to writing historical fiction because of his age. He has five grown children, which means "I'm detached from the [young] kids today. So in a curious way it's easier for me to write historical fiction, because I can research it."

The third *Crispin* book comes out in June.

The dead don't care

Allan Bick



Thomas Lynch is more occupied with death than your average poet. This could have something to do with his other occupation as an undertaker, but it could also be his conviction that how people deal with death is directly related to how we deal with dead bodies.

I asked him why we have to cope with a corpse before we can come to terms with death.

"When we are just thinking about the idea of death," he explained, "we can think about it endlessly. But dealing with the dead helps us deal with death in fact."

Dealing with the dead is something he speaks of from experience, having buried his own father and mother as well as many friends and colleagues. He does more than just show up at the graveside; even when he's not the undertaker, Lynch gets involved – from wrapping up the deceased so they can be brought to the morgue, to embalming, to…well you get the point. He has been part of the entire process. Lynch strongly feels that unless a person has a hand in the funeral of a loved one, he or she cannot properly manage grief. He recalled a recent trip to Ireland to bury a best friend: "When my friend Sunny died a few weeks ago, it was by going there to help dig his grave, help carry his body out of the house, go to the service at the church and help close his grave that let me deal with Sunny being gone."

The immediate afterlife

If this discussion of dead bodies was the extent of Lynch's poetry or essays, they wouldn't be worth reading. His writing, however, has a sharp practical side to it too, which is echoed in his speech. Even when discussing his good friend Sunny.

"The practical fact is that if Sunny doesn't get buried, he is going to smell," explained Lynch. "Something has to be done with the dead guy."

So people have come up with many ways to deal with dead bodies: burying, burning, floating out to sea and above-ground burials. But those are all beside the point, because, according to Lynch, "the dead don't care."

"I've never had a dead person say to me 'I'd rather you did this instead,'" remarked Lynch, "'I'd rather wear the blue suit' or 'I'd rather have roses.'"

This sounds flippant, but Lynch has dealt with a great number of dead bodies.

"Those who have died – nothing that has been done to them or for them or with them since they have died seems to have mattered to them," he says. "But it matters to you, to those who loved them. Dead people don't care; living people care."

And that is the central theme in all his work, whether as undertaker or poet: the dead body is important only in how we relate to it. If we do not care about the corpse, we show little care for the person. Therefore Lynch worries about a society that increasingly delegates the handling of the corpse. If we don't show up for the funeral, he argued, we don't seem to show up entirely for life, or think about the afterlife.

"It is death that prompts such curiosity [about the afterlife]," Lynch said. "We ask these questions: is that all there is, can it happen to me, what comes next?"

His musings often seem irreverent because they deal with the humorous or practical sides of death. But in truth we deserve his pointed reminders for failing to pay attention to dead bodies and properly processing death.

Allan Bick (allanmbick@gmail.com) lives in Barrie.

Aubade

Thomas Lynch

When he was finished hitting her he went
to work. She woke the boys, sent them to school,
then hung herself with a belt she'd bought him
for his birthday. He would never get it.

Aubade: a poem or song about lovers separating in the morning.

New Bible highlights its hero

Allan Bick

Sally Lloyd-Jones, a native of England, has written three best-selling Bibles for children. She's also the author of many picture books, including *How to be a Baby: By Me, the Big Sister,* and *Handbag Friends*. Allan Bick interviewed Lloyd-Jones about *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, focusing on the challenges and possibilities that come from re-imagining Scripture.

What motivated you to write a children's Bible?

Lloyd-Jones: Well, I grew up reading the Bible, and I thought it was a book telling me what I should and shouldn't do – really how I wasn't doing anything right. I grew up thinking that God wouldn't love me because I wasn't doing it right.

I wanted children to have a different impression. I grew up with the idea that I had to earn my salvation, but there is nothing we can do to earn salvation. Salvation comes, as a free gift, from God.

So each story purposely points to Jesus. Why?

Lloyd-Jones: Every time I looked at a children's story Bible, I saw the danger in simplifying an adult book: that you can lose the core truth. I remember reading stories about Daniel in the lions' den and, as a six year old, thinking I'm not that brave, but God wants me to be brave; he loved Daniel who was brave, so how could he love me? With a story like Daniel, it is very easy to ask children, "How can Daniel help us to lead better lives?" We do have to behave in a certain way, but that's a different thing. If we can earn our salvation, then why did Jesus come?

And every story points to him …

Lloyd-Jones: Yes, and when you forget that, you are condemned. For example, the story of David and Goliath. David was very brave, and you think, "What if I'm not that brave?" and it leaves you in despair.

But you can think, "Yes, David was brave, but he also failed in many ways. There is going to be a greater hero who is going to defeat a much more scary foe. For us." It is not about our ability but about God and his love.

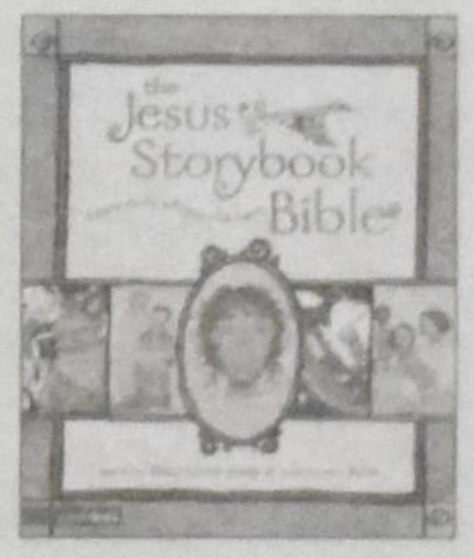
I wanted every story to be about God's amazing love.

This is also reflected in the end of the *Jesus Storybook Bible*, after Revelations, with "To be continued…"

Lloyd-Jones: I wanted children to realize that it isn't over yet; we live in the in-between, and he is coming again.

Did it make you nervous to re-tell Biblical stories?

Lloyd-Jones: (laughs) Yes. It's always hard as a writer to not think that it's hopeless, all the voices in your head telling you it can't be done, not by you. And there is an added layer of holiness with a Bible story. So there are lots of reasons to be terrified. But it's not a translation but a re-telling, a distillation of the core truth. So I would sit down and give it to God and say "Yes, I'm a sinner, I can't do this, so if you don't do this, it won't get done." Then I would start writing. It was an act of faith and an act of worship.



"Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn't do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn't mainly about you and what you should be doing. It's about God and what he has done.

Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you'll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren't heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose). They get afraid and run away. At times they are downright mean.

No, the Bible isn't a book of rules or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything – to rescue the one he loves…."

–from *The Jesus Storybook Bible.*

Columns

From the 11th Province
Marian Van Til

God's purpose in our afflictions

Has God ever afflicted you? And if or when he did, could you say, "It was good for me to be afflicted"? "That's a strange question," you may say. "And it's wrong. *Satan* afflicts us. *God* comforts, heals and loves us. He is compassionate and gracious and doesn't make our lives miserable. That's Satan's specialty."

True, Satan afflicts, accuses and wreaks havoc in our lives and across the world. And, yes, God is our comforter and healer, and God is love. But the author of Psalm 119 confesses that God afflicted him and it was good for him. He even tells God, "In *faithfulness* [my emphasis] you have afflicted me." The Bible doesn't teach that Satan afflicts us while God busies himself doing "good" things.

God's purpose in such painful discipline is our nurture and growth and his own glory. The Psalmist says, "It was good for me to be afflicted *so that I might learn your decrees*" (Ps. 119:71). Just previous to that confession he acknowledges to God, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." Lest we begin to grumble against a God who would discipline us, the Psalmist quickly adds, "You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees" (v. 67-68). The writer is, in effect, asking God for continued discipline: "Teach me your decrees." Do *we* dare ask that of God?

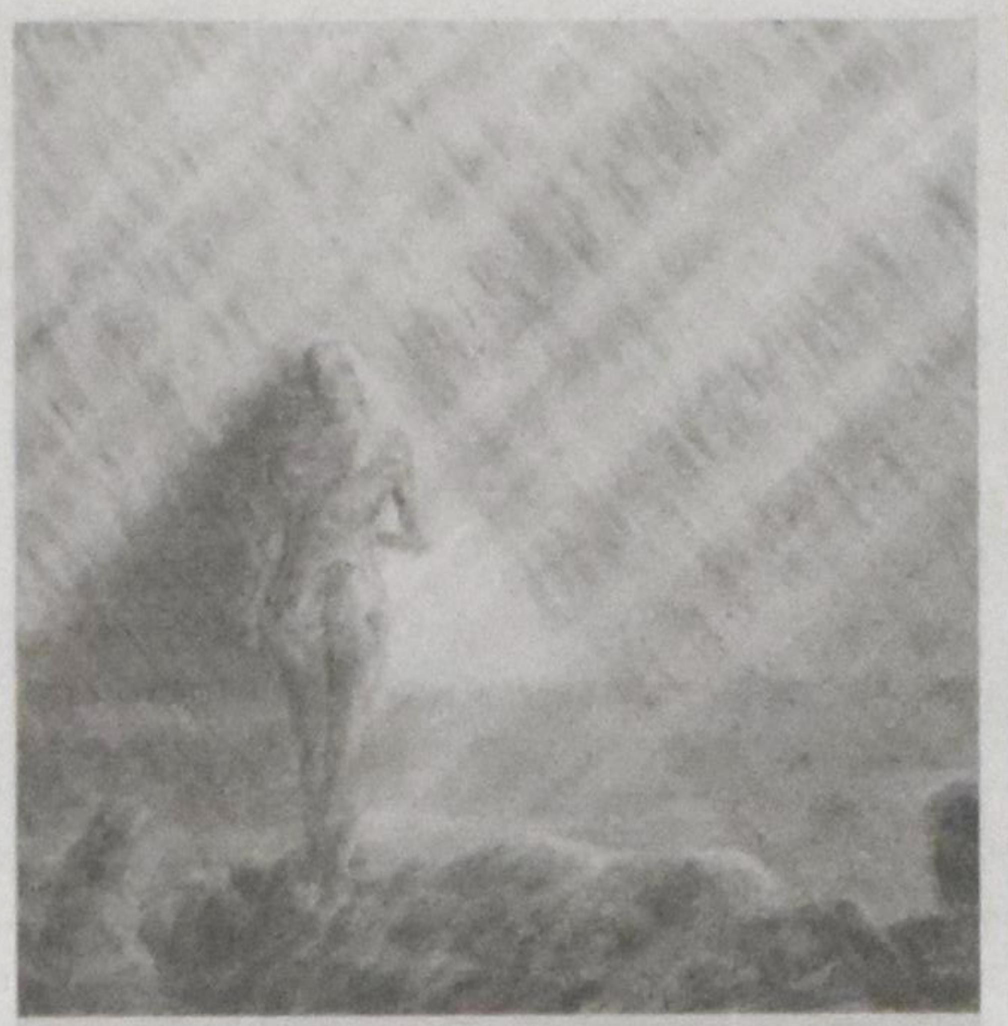
A little later the Psalmist admits, "If your law had not been my delight I would have perished in my affliction.... Save me, for I am yours." He assumes God *will* save him and work out his affliction for good. Centuries later, Romans 8 contains the corollary: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."

The affliction God visited on the Psalmist was clearly not just the odd bad week or month. He suffered; deeply enough that he believed his pain would have engulfed him were it not for his clinging to God and God's law in hope.

Severe mercies

But if *God* afflicts us, where is Satan in it? And what about when our own foolhardiness causes our affliction? God rules Satan, the Bible makes clear; and God is not absent when he allows and purposes Satan's havoc. God, in fact, often gives Satan the power to destroy the bodies of God's saints, and sometimes gruesomely. God has even established the number of martyrs that must die for his sake before Christ returns (but will never let Satan destroy us utterly). We can't often fathom God's purposes in such things. We can only confess that God is God and does what he pleases (Job 23, Ps. 115, Ps. 135, Dan. 4). And so in some way, such severe mercies ultimately give glory to his name.

This all sounds contradictory and very far from 21st-century "values." Should we just admit that God's sovereignty is a dusty doctrine that John Calvin wrung from the Bible 500 years ago in a far more austere age? If we take Scripture seriously as the Word of the Lord to us, we can't do that. "All my days were written in your book before one of them came to be," says David in Psalm 139. "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that," says James. God ordains when we live and die (and how and where).



Tested and Refined

Praise our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard;

he has preserved our lives
and kept our feet from slipping.

For you, O God, tested us;
you refined us like silver.

Psalm 66:8-10
From Painting the Psalms Series by Melanie Pyke (www.melpyke.com)

Reconciling Satan's evil with a righteous, holy God having a hand in everything that happens, bad and good, is an unfathomable mystery. I've experienced years of chronic illness and four deaths (two of them sudden) in my immediate family. I think I can now say, "It was good for me to be afflicted." Many of you have endured similar things, and other afflictions that God has not called on me to face. If God had *not* had purpose in those experiences – if he is impotent against Satan's power and never knows when or where Satan will strike next – could you live with *that*? Would he *be* God?

It's not enough to say that God "allows" Satan to act. Scripture teaches from Alpha to Omega that God has purpose in all that happens in his world and that it happens as he ordains. That may defy our human logic but I find it to be the most comforting biblical teaching imaginable.

Marian Van Til is a former C.C. editor who lives in Youngstown, NY, with her husband and five cats. Her book about life with cats, Confessions of a Cataholic, *was released on Reformation Day. For a signed copy see < www.WordPowerPublishing.com> or write Marian at mvantil@roadrunner.com, or call 716-745-7073.*

Co-owning the Earth
Bert Hielema

The end of cheap oil and cheap food

Does the earth feel pain? Of course, if you believe what the Bible says in Romans 8:22, where it is recorded that the whole creation has been groaning in agony. It must be screaming now that oil is destroying very vulnerable wetlands in the Southern states and polluting the Gulf of Mexico.

What is the ultimate price we are willing to pay for oil, not only in dollars but also in natural habitat destruction? The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is just the most recent disaster. The other costs are more hidden: air pollution, asthma, global "weirding." So the latest news that we are approaching PEAK OIL should perhaps be regarded as Good News.

Who says this time that we are approaching Peak Oil? The United States Joint Forces Command says so. In a press release this powerful body has told the world that "a severe energy crunch is inevitable without a massive expansion of production and refining capacity." It suggests that "by 2012, surplus oil production capacity could entirely disappear, and as early as 2015, the shortfall in output could reach nearly 10 million barrels per day." It warns that a chronic constraint looms behind the immediate crisis: even under "the most optimistic scenario … petroleum production will be hard pressed to meet the expected future demand."

Demand increases

Less available energy for the world's household can be compared to a family suddenly facing job losses or decreasing wages. That would not in itself be a bad thing, if prices would also decline and purchasing power maintained, but if the cost of living goes up, that family will experience a double whammy, and may be reduced to sudden poverty, if not worse.

A family needs money to operate, just as oil is needed to keep the world economy going. Money can be created out of nothing. That's why banks are so profitable. But that is not the case with oil, which is becoming ever more difficult to obtain, while demand goes up. India and China, with close to 40 percent of the world's population, have an increasing appetite for energy, which will produce mushrooming prices.

Paradoxically less available oil will produce more pollution, because everyone, including China – already using 80 percent coal to generate electricity – will increase the use of much higher polluting coal, especially as electric cars become all the rage.

The recent eruption of the Iceland volcano which stopped airplane traffic dead is but a pinprick prelude of what is at store when high octane airplane fuel will no longer be plentiful and cheap. It will not disappear, of course, but tripling the cost of the airplane power source will put an effective stop to all but the most necessary air travel. And that will only be a minor nuisance compared to other inconveniences, such as food costs, or even its very availability.

Food costs increase

During the past five decades agriculture has become energy-intensive in every respect. The earth we own has, by and large, lost its natural state, and its soil has become a chemical soup laced with pesticides and herbicides – both synthesized from oil – and other chemicals. We are now also threatened with impossible-to-eliminate killer weeds. With the price of nitrogen fertilizers, produced from natural gas, increasing exponentially at the same rate as its carbon-brother oil, and tractors and other farm machinery burning diesel fuel and gasoline, with crops trucked long distances, and food packaged in oil-derived plastic, by the time it has traveled from land to mouth, very few people will be able to afford it.

One hundred years ago, 70 percent of the population was rural. Today, the

God made a way: *an interview with Harouna Issaka*

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In November 2009, Harouna Issaka, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee's Program Consultant for West Africa, spoke to my church community about his work in Mali. He also told the riveting story of his courtship and marriage to Marie, a Muslim woman who converted to Christianity. The couple are now the proud parents of David and Caleb. In an e-mail interview, *Christian Courier* asked Harouna Issaka to retell his story.

Tell us about your religious backgrounds. When did you become Christians?

Harouna Issaka: I was born into a Christian family and was baptized on Dec. 26, 1994, along with my twin brother. Marie was born into a Muslim family and grew up as a Muslim, while her grandmother was animist (a traditional African religion). Marie spent time with her from when she was two until she was eight and learned a little about animist religious practices. As a teenager, she and her parents lived close to a Christian family who had children the same age as Marie. Through visiting this family, she heard about Christ. She decided to become a Christian, but she didn't know how to, because her family moved to another city and they lost contact with her Christian friends. When I met her, she became a Christian and started to go church.

Where did you meet?

Harouna Issaka:Marie and I met in 2000. She was studying journalism, and I was working at an agriculture research station. Her school and my office were close to each other.

Did you experience opposition to your relationship?

Harouna Issaka: As good Muslims, there was no way Marie's family would allow me, a Christian, to marry their daughter. Muslim culture and tradition avoid that kind of marriage, but the Muslim religion encourages male members to marry Christian women in order to convert them.

When Marie and I met, the first thing that we did was to focus on building up her faith. We knew that we loved each other, but the most important thing was to see her faith grow. The first strategy wasn't to talk to the family about our sentimental relationship but to let them know that Marie was a Christian. We believed that if Marie could succeed in being accepted as a Christian by her family, we could talk about marriage later.

When Marie was ready, she told her parents that she was a Christian. They had already suspected that she had changed her religion. She faced persecution and troubles because she challenged not only the Muslim religion but also the lifestyle – the political, economic and family systems. Her father thought this was treason. According to Islamic law, all Muslims, even her father, had the right to kill her. He let her know that he would kill her if she did not leave home.

What impact did your relationship have on your families and community?

Harouna Issaka: During the period of persecution and troubles, we continued to pray and act positively in and for her family. Marie knew that she broke her parents' hearts, particularly her father's, because she was close to him and he felt that she had betrayed him. She stayed with her family during all the persecution, even when they daily humiliated, beat and threatened her. We were supported through prayer by my family, friends and some other Christians.

Two and a half years after our wedding ceremony, bandits attacked and almost killed Marie's father at home. When we shared this story with our church, the whole community came to visit him and shared the compassion of Christ with him. For the first time since Marie became a Christian, her father sobbed and said, "This is a true religion."

God gave us wisdom to not cut off the relationship between Marie and her parents. We asked forgiveness from them, and we also forgave. Marie built a new relationship with her family. Sometimes she asked them if we could pray for them, but now they are the ones who take the initiative to ask us to pray for them.

How did God make it possible for you to get married?

Harouna Issaka: As I have already mentioned, we focused on Marie's faith and maintained the relationship between her and the family. Then, by prayer, we started seeking God's will for our wedding. The process of getting married in our West African culture isn't easy because the family has a strong structure. It can allow or reject all things. The wedding ceremony is a family business in our culture, even in the church.

So before I let my family know Marie's and my desire to get married, we spent one year fasting and praying. After that, my family made an appointment with Marie's family in order to talk about the issue. We saw the hand of the Lord during that process because God had already worked in the heart of Marie's father who had accepted the idea that Marie became a Christian. Marie and I saw God in front of us during this battle. He changed all hostility into a benediction until the day we got married.

Who attended your wedding? What impact did the ceremony have on those who witnessed it?

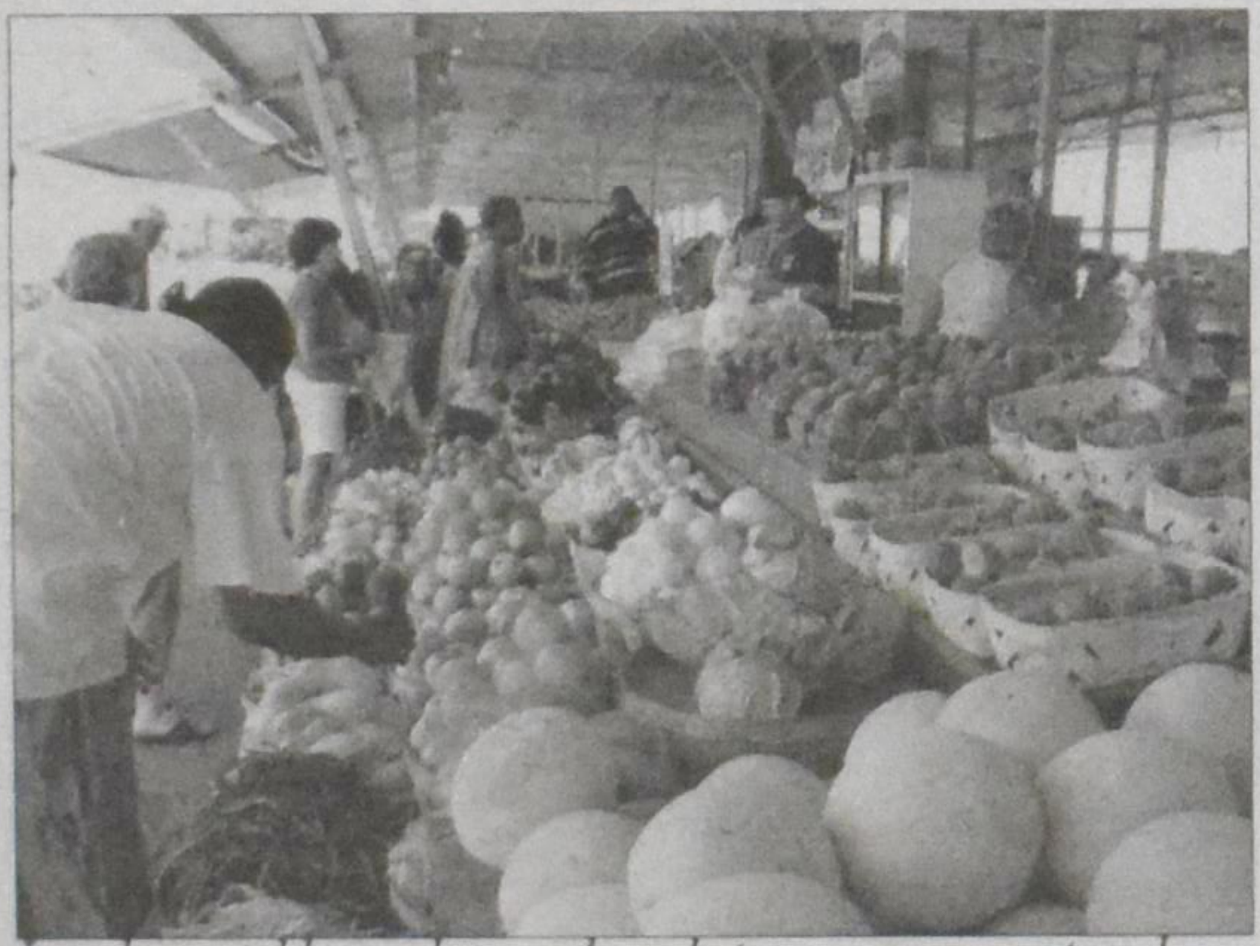
Harouna Issaka: More than four hundred people attended our wedding ceremony. Three quarters of them were not Christians; they were members of Marie's family. After the wedding ceremony, some of Marie's family members went back home and said, "We also want to be Christians." But the family's elders called a meeting and threatened all of them, commanding them to never talk about Christianity again.

How is God continuing to use your marriage as a witness to both Christians and Muslims?

Harouna Issaka: Our life continued to be a good testimony for them for the glory of the Lord since Marie's family always used our behaviour as an example to explain to others how to live in peace and to be respectful of their parents. They have also discovered that we are not against them and that we are very respectful of our culture and tradition. Last November when I travelled to Canada for one month, Marie and our children stayed with her family. During that time, Marie's younger sister became a Christian. The Holy Spirit continues to work in her family. Pray for us.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, ON. She has recently published her first children's picture book, Monzi and Mama's Stories, *copies of which can be ordered at sonyavf55@hotmail.com.*

US no longer includes the category of full-time farmers in its census forms. It can be safely said that with no oil, or only extremely costly fuel available, society as we know it will cease to exist. Jeff Rubin, former economist with the CIBC, in his book, *Why Your World Is About to Get a Whole Lot Smaller, Oil and the End of Globalization,* writes that our long-distance food supply will come to an end, and local produce will become the norm. So start your garden now; have a 100-foot diet, so that you can eat your own produce. Of course that will not be possible when you live on the 15th floor of a condo downtown somewhere. So, with high fuel prices, these places might not be your best bet anymore. Jeff Rubin sees 60 cents for a pound of bananas or $4 for a dozen oranges or cheap California lettuce or impossible-to-eat Mexican tomatoes as a quirk of history, only made possible through a temporary spurt in cheap fuel.



Local vegetable gardens and markets – a necessary trend.

What should we do in the light of these circumstances?

More about that in a next column.

Bert Hielema (bert@hielema.ca) has a web site – hielema.ca – on which essays, books, and more than 500 columns are available free of charge.

Memoirs

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

No badgering… just honest discussions

A relationship changes over time and so do our needs. Unfortunately, we are not always aware of this. We tend to seek security and familiarity in our relationships and see changes as threatening when in actual fact they make us grow and mature. And so, when we find ourselves in an unexpected or new situation we may want to challenge each other to step up to the plate and work through our differences allowing us to enjoy a deeper level of intimacy.

Q. I have been in a relationship for three years with someone I love dearly but who wants to complete his studies and have two years of work under his belt before committing to marriage and family. He tells me he loves me and wants to have a life together in the future, but right now he needs to focus on completing his qualifications in his profession, which includes two years work experience. I understand where he is coming from, but, now that he is graduating and has a possible position in a highly respected office, I feel I need some certainty from him that we are heading in the same direction. During the last months, whenever I bring up my need for commitment from him, he becomes irritable. He tells me he was clear about our relationship from the start and for me to badger him about my need for certainty now is not helpful and could be detrimental to a possible future together. I am presently 25 years old and will be 27 by the time he may finally commit to a life-long relationship with or without me. This troubles me.

A. I understand your concern about your boyfriend not wanting to solidify the relationship you have with one another. At the same time, he made himself clear at the beginning of the relationship about needing to focus on completing his qualifications and securing some experience in his field. While his honesty is commendable, the natural development of relationships over time does push us towards needing a commitment for a shared future. If that is not forthcoming we feel minimized and taken for granted.

Having said this, I would like to suggest some men can, indeed, be so conscientious in their provider role they do not feel comfortable or even worthy of committing themselves to someone for life if they cannot properly provide for the ones they love.

Consequently, I believe you need to have a heart to heart talk with your boyfriend in a way he does not feel threatened. Acknowledge that he was clear with you at the beginning of the relationship, but tell him you would now like to understand where he is coming from in terms of his reluctance to commit himself to you when you have been together for three years.

I am also curious about the words "…that my need for certainty now is not helpful and could be detrimental to a possible future together." I suggest you try to understand what he means by this statement. For yourself, what was acceptable at the beginning of the relationship may not work for you after three years. This is a normal developmental process for most relationships. What fits in one stage may not work later on. Furthermore, you need to talk about your "needs being detrimental to a possible future" together. I am hoping these are not the words he used as you were addressing your concerns. Your needs, as well as his, are an important part of your developing relationship and should not be minimized nor ignored because they are part and parcel of who you are, as well as who he is, as a person.

If you are unsuccessful in gaining a better understanding of your boyfriend's lack of wanting to commit but both of you want to stay in the relationship, I suggest you seek out a third party such as a pastor or a therapist who can help unravel some of the underlying issues that might be troubling either of you.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

To my grandchildren, with love

Trudy Joldersma

When we talked about WWII, some of you asked me what it "feels" like to be "liberated." In this letter I'll try to give you a picture of how our family experienced liberation on that unforgettable Easter Sunday, April 10, 1945, the day when the "Canadians" came to drive our enemy out of our farming area around the small town of Holten, the Netherlands.

No German snipers were hiding in our home, but still our farm came under Allied fire, which severely damaged the living quarters of our old-style farm house (living quarters and stable under one roof) and killed all our cows in the stable. All this happened while our family of 20 sat packed in an underground trench in our back yard. Our "family" consisted of our parents and seven children, ranging in age from 14 to 29 and still living at home. Our oldest brother, Dick (31), with his wife Johanna and their three-year-old Wim, had moved in with us again, as their home in town was endangered by Allied air attacks on German troop movements in town. The rest of the "family" were men in hiding and three adopted "hunger children" who, with hundreds of others, had been placed in rural areas by a church program to relieve city families in their dire food shortage.

Terror and joy

My brothers had dug this trench at the advice of the BBC, to which my brother Henk secretly listened every night in the stable, where the radio was hidden from the Nazis. We were warned that any area in Holland could become a battle zone between the Allied armies and the retreating German snipers hiding in homes and buildings.

By this time the German army was in complete disarray. We still see it as a miracle that we survived that frightening hour when, indeed, we were in the middle of actual combat. Moments before this ordeal started, our youngest sister (14) had made us all laugh with an ironic remark on our "comfortable" seating arrangement. We sat shoulder to shoulder on the sodden "benches" along the earthen wall, with sand rolling down our backs with every move. But the laughter died at the sound of thundering explosions in the field directly beside our trench. We all sat in silence, every muscle strained in panic, as we listened to the deafening explosions and smelled the gaseous fumes of the shells. My sister remembers that the roof of our shelter was made of layers of branches, sods, dry horse manure and more branches. So at best, the roof protected us from flying shrapnel, but a direct hit of a shell would have killed us all in an instant. Johanna's sudden cry spoke for all of us when she shouted above the noise "Va, bid vuu' oons." ("Dad, pray for us!") Came my father's trembling voice: "Kind, det doo'k a'lange." ("Child, I've been doing that for a long time.")

After what seemed like hours, the explosions stopped. The sudden silence felt eerie. What next? Soon we heard voices and laughter coming from the entrance. Then the word passed from person to person: "The Allies are here! We are freeeee!!" My poor mother, who had been the last person to tumble into the trench, was the first person to be confronted by two men in green pointing a rifle at her, which brought her into a hysteric shock, as she took the soldiers to be Germans. "I thought for sure we would all be killed," she said later. In her confusion, she asked: "Tommies?" (British soldiers). The soldiers, sensing her distress, pointed at their shoulder insignia as one of them soothingly said to her: "Mother, we are Canadians!"

While crawling out through the narrow entrance, falling all over each other in our excitement to meet our liberators, the soldiers stood in position, rifle at the ready, obviously on the alert for a possible German sniper hiding among this odd-looking crowd of various gender and ages. Some of us spotted a look of amazement in the soldiers' eyes, or perhaps even amusement, as they watched so many people popping out of such a small space. By the time the last one of us stood in an upright position, we were surrounded by a whole platoon of soldiers, laughing and shaking hands with us. Some of our family's more daring ones even took to hugging the soldiers.

Oppression

What does it feel like to be liberated? I cannot answer this question without briefly touching on what it feels like to be oppressed. But how can one condense the feelings of five years of oppression in a few sentences? In brief, I would describe the experience of oppression as an ever-present feeling of fear, hate and anger. Perhaps mostly hate at that foreign regime that had brutally crossed our border with their heavy armory and armies of well-trained soldiers. In four days they had taken over our little country with a regime that stole from us our human rights and freedom in all areas of our existence.

Canadian soldiers advancing

Step by step they tightened the knot around us, starting with the tragic rounding up of all the Jews for transport to concentration camps, followed by the summons that every citizen 18 and over had to obtain a pass, with picture and fingerprints – a document that made us hostages in our own country. Next, we had to hand over our radios. The one radio that we were allowed gave us only Nazi propaganda and Hitler's speeches. Soon the printed press was Nazi-

controlled, and public meetings of any kind were forbidden. Churches could still worship, but preachers were muzzled, as spies were sometimes hiding among the worshipers. Several pastors paid with their lives for speaking out against the regime.

An eight p.m. curfew kept us inside without electricity, as we sat huddled around a candle, if we were lucky to have candles. Soon, empty store shelves told the story of shortage of any and all merchandise. Our foreign rulers demanded that farmers sell their produce to the "state," with a small percentage for their own use. In our farming area that meant that at grain threshing a controller stood by to record the number of sacks of grain yielded. What angered us about this regulation was that this food was not going to our own citizens, as the city people died of starvation. Most controllers dared to turn a blind eye when the farmer carried an extra sack of grain into the house to boost his own share. This enabled the farmer to feed the young men in hiding and have something to share with hungry city dwellers who walked long miles from the city to the countryside begging for food. So, in fact, farmers had to "steal" from their own produce to supplement the insufficient ration allotted to them in coupons. City-dwellers, who did not have this privilege, had to live or die on their inadequate coupon ratio. How could we help hating our oppressors?

Canadian War Cemetery in Holten

As anger and hate were our constant companions, so was fear, the ever present fear that some day the S.S., that most feared corps of military police who were trained in merciless brutality, would catch up with our having a secret radio (punished by concentration camp) or with our young men hiding from the demand of working in the German war industry, or with our brothers and friends involved in the resistance movement. During "manhunts," when the German weapon industry needed a fresh supply of slave labour, the S.S would barge into our homes any time of day or night and search every nook and corner of the house for our young men. The men who tried to escape by running were shot in flight, others who surrendered were without delay put on trains to Germany.

Liberation

So what did it feel like to be liberated? I believe we experienced the moment of our liberation as an inexpressible feeling of relief that we had thrown off the ever-present bondage we had endured for five long years. It was an undefined awareness that from now on we would not see any unwanted soldiers marching through our streets. No more frightening manhunts. We would be free citizens in our own country again, without having to carry on our person that humiliating "pass" with our picture and fingerprints. I believe when we stood face to face with our Canadian liberators, all these feelings of regained freedom found expression in a burst of boisterous jubilance that the enemy was being driven out of our country. For us young folks the enemy had taken five precious years away from us. Now we would have the chance to work on a new future, our very own future. We were rambunctious, like students let out of class on the day holidays start. This triumphant feeling flowed over into a sense of inexpressible gratitude to the men who had come over from their "home and native land" to drive out an enemy in a foreign country. What a sacrifice! They deserved our greatest respect.

A welcome joy

After 65 years I can still call to mind the sight of all that heavy war machinery rolling down the dirt road in front of our farm and of all those soldiers walking around our barnyard relaxed and laughing. It was clearly also a triumph for them to see the people so happy with their arrival. To this day I remember them with a sense of the greatest respect and gratitude.

I don't remember how my brother Gerard hit upon the idea of offering to cut the soldiers' hair. He was not a barber. But my brothers were skilled in cutting each other's hair. Thus, after Gerard had put a kitchen chair in the shade of the linden tree at the corner of the house, and with apron, hand clipper, scissors and comb had installed himself as a barber, the word quickly got around among the soldiers, and they came to him, sometimes standing in line, laughing and gesticulating, as the language barrier called for exaggerated body language.

The soldiers obviously enjoyed their well-deserved break and only left the next morning to face a repeat of their dangerous mission. For us, the next day would be one of facing the ravages of warfare in the loss of our herd and in all the broken windows and holes in the walls and roof of our house. We assessed the damage of shrapnel spread all over our fields and pastures. But as for that first day, it was all joy and laughter for both liberators and liberated. It is not an overstatement to say that on the day of our liberation, the Dutch people literally fell in love with the "Canadians" (as we called our liberators). This may well explain why so many of us who left war-torn Holland chose to emigrate to Canada.

Lest we forget

The people of my hometown feel that bond with the "Canadians" in a very special and lasting way, as Holten became one of the four sites in Holland chosen as a burial place for fallen Canadian soldiers. The Holten military cemetery counts 1,394 graves of Canadian heroes, young men all. I am told that the Dutch school system keeps the story of the liberation alive in their history classes, so I may say with confidence that the third generation of students in Holten are fully impressed with the reason why, every year on Liberation Day, they march the 3-kilometer trek to the Canadian cemetery to pay tribute to these liberators by putting flowers on their graves.

I'll close on the sobering note that at the time of our liberation, we had no idea of how many men had died in the operation to free Nazi-occupied Europe. It was later, when we watched WWII documentaries on television, that we were faced with the reality of the horrendous toll on young lives this operation had taken. Coming face to face with this fact would at times make us feel guilty. Was the freedom of Europe – and of our little country – worth the sacrifice of so many young lives? But then we would get stuck in this unsolvable dilemma: what would have happened to us had the "Canadians" not come over to liberate us? We, the liberated, can only humbly salute our liberators, and with the greatest respect and gratitude remember them and pass on their memory to generations to come. That's why I pass on this story to you, my grandchildren.

LEST WE FORGET!

–Your Oma

Grandma's Wisdom

We always knew
Her door wide open
When we could not cope

She deeply cared
And always shared
All our joys and fears.

She knew so well
How and when to speak
But better still, she knew
How to listen and
to let her silence speak.

Lini Richarda Grol

Lini Grol's poems, stories and scissor-cut illustrations are in books and magazines.

The last German soldier – May 1945

Didy Prinzen *(as told by her husband)*

He felt his heart pounding while he was moving along slowly and carefully. The danger around him was palpable, and he now wondered if it would not have been better to wait a day or so. But he was anxious to get home now that the war was coming to an end. Maybe this very day it would.

Early morning mist was hovering over the fields, and it looked as though the cows he saw had no legs. There was a promise in the air of a beautiful spring day. The sounds of battle, however, belied this peaceful scene.

As he made his way cautiously, there was happy anticipation in his heart because the war was ending, but at the same time he also detected a good amount of fear. There was still a lot of fighting going on. Although the main roads were very unsafe with all kinds of German soldiers trying to get back to Germany, here in the fields also lurked danger all around him. Nothing however could have kept him from attempting to get home.

He was trying to reach their farm through the fields along paths that he alone knew. Many a Saturday night he had travelled this same route to visit with his family while he worked voluntarily on the farm of a German relative who lived just across the border. It had been too dangerous for him to stay at home. All the young men in Holland had to report for labour in Germany, mostly in factories. This had spared him from that same fate. In the meantime his younger brothers were helping out on the farm at home.

Under normal circumstances the distance to their farm was rather short and took no more than half an hour but this early morning it seemed to last an eternity. He had to hide for a while under a small bridge, fearful of being shot at or being hit by the shrapnel of a shell or grenade. At times he thought he would never get home again and silently he prayed for protection.

When he finally reached their farm the mist had dissipated and the sun come out. He was surprised to find the yard quiet. The place looked forsaken. He did not see any of his family. Then it dawned on him that they might still be afraid. There was also no sign of the seven airmen who'd been hiding up in the attic for months, and he concluded that they too likely wouldn't dare to come out of their hiding place as yet!

When he stepped into the big kitchen he found it also empty. Where was everybody? Had they perhaps all been taken away? Had the Germans at this late hour discovered what had been going on at this farm? Suddenly fear gripped him by the throat.

As he quickly walked across the kitchen to investigate the rest of the house he heard an anxious voice coming from the cellar door, "Hendrik, are you there? Come on down. Quick!" He relaxed. What relief! It was his mother's voice. She likely had recognized his step. Apparently the whole family, all eleven of them, was hiding in the cellar.

A surprising guest

But he didn't want to go down there. Except for the rumbling of war in the distance all was quiet now, and he was not afraid anymore. Wasn't the war ending, and weren't all kinds of exciting things happening this very moment? After all, he wasn't a kid anymore. On dark moonless nights he had more than once helped gather weaponry and ammunition that the allies' airplanes had dropped off in a nearby field. On a wagon with rubber tires that had burlap sacks bound around its whipple-tree to prevent making noise, he had proudly held the reins in his hands to guide the horse while the head of the underground sat beside him. And many a time he had sat in this kitchen talking with the underground people and with the seven airmen hiding in the attic who at night sometimes came down to visit with the family. No, he was not going to go down in the cellar now. So he called down, "It's all right, Mother. I'll be careful!"

Then he startled! Did he hear the back door opening behind him? Quickly he turned around, careful not to give any lead to where the family was hiding. Then he saw that a man had walked in – a lone German soldier – disheveled and muddy. He barely recognized the so hated uniform. But yes, he was a German. The white of the man's eyes dominated his face. "He looks just like the men who work on the threshing machine in the summer," he thought. It looked like he had come straight from the battlefield. And no doubt he had. He carried a gun with bayonet slung over one shoulder and ... a big ham by its strings on his other shoulder. "That ham has likely been stolen from one of our neighbours," he thought. It was well-known that the Germans were robbing the country of just about anything they could get their hands on.

He just stood there, so startled with this unexpected event that he didn't know what to do. But somehow he was not afraid of the soldier. This man was down and out and wasn't up to doing any harm. He was not too surprised when the soldier took the gun off his shoulder and hung it over the back of a kitchen chair. He then let himself heavily down on another one. Next he put his arms on the table and rested his head on it. The man was totally exhausted. He had not said a word. Was he perhaps shellshocked? How nonchalantly did he treat his gun! He didn't seem to think of the fact that he could easily be overpowered if there were any men on the farm. Had he even noticed him standing there, watching?

But he had to get this soldier with his gun out of the house before he would fall fast asleep. Even though he was dead tired and did not pose a threat at the moment one never knew what he might do. Suddenly he knew what he would do. Stealthily throwing glances at the man now and then, he picked up some kindling wood and started the stove. He was sure that the only way to get him out of there was to feed him.

A question suddenly entered his mind. "Why was he doing this?" Was it only just to get rid of him? Why was he starting up the fire to enable this soldier to fry his stolen ham? After all, wasn't he an enemy, one of them who had invaded his country, had ruined it and had oppressed it for five years? Was it because of his own underlying fear of something unexpected happening – somebody coming up from the cellar, or mother calling his name again?

He knew that it was this fear, although only in part. Deep in his heart he knew that he pitied this man who was so clearly down and out. He felt not a bit of animosity towards him. He liked to think that this soldier was one of those who had not wanted to go to war, had not wanted to take part in a dictator's rule.

Whatever the reason, he was praying all the while that nobody would disturb them. He knew that this peaceful encounter could quickly change into a deadly one – especially if one of the airmen should show up.

Suddenly he felt that the soldier was watching him. But he was not afraid of him. He even felt a kind of kinship with him! This man would try to walk home just like he had done this morning. He would likely choose the same path through the fields. How he hoped that he would be able to make it!

A strange connection

In the meantime the stove had really gotten hot, and he took a pan out of the cupboard and a knife from a drawer to cut the ham. That was all that he had to do, though. The soldier seemed to be really awake now. He was hungry! Getting up he picked up the knife, lifted the very large ham from the chair, and, cutting it into thick slices, he started to put them in the frying pan. He still paid no attention to him. Fascinated, Hendrik watched him wolf the food down. The plate was empty in no time at all. It made him feel good to see this man, who was definitely starved, still his hunger.

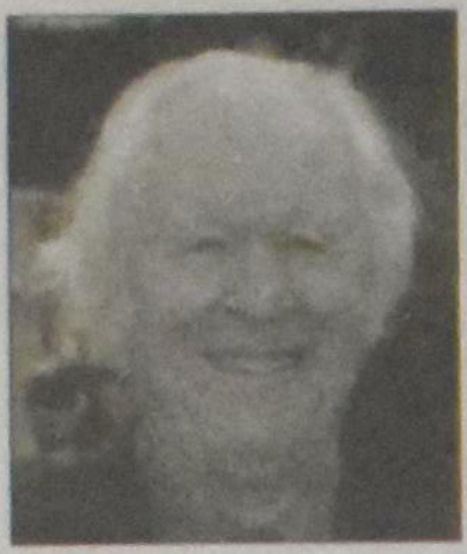
Immediately, then, the soldier got up, took his gun from the chair, put it back on his shoulder and headed out the door without a word. Just like that! It happened so quickly that he could hardly believe that he was gone. And he thought how strange it was that the man never acknowledged his presence.

The kitchen now seemed strangely quiet. The distant sound of battle could still be heard. He hastened to the window and watched the soldier walk away along the same path he himself had just trodden but in the opposite direction. He saw him walk but not with the quick military step befitting a soldier of Hitler's army – with the slow tread of a tired and beaten man whose only wish was to get home safely.

And at the sight of this defeated German soldier leaving their property he saw the symbol of the fall of a mighty army and the hope in a resurrection of his poor, ruined country. He turned around and with a shout opened the cellar door.

Today, 65 years later, he again wonders if that soldier made it home.

Didy Prinzen is a long-time contributor to Christian Courier. *She lives in Whitby, Ontario.*



My friend Carl, the way I experienced him

Wietse Posthumus

The first time I saw Carl was at Calvin College almost 50 years ago. Even then he was a large physical presence and I remember thinking that he bestrode the campus in a few giant steps. In the same way he completed his undergraduate studies before going to Seminary. He was in a hurry. He had a lot of years to make up after Hitler et al. had squandered a decade of his life in combat, camps and the obscenity of war. He stayed committed to a vow to serve and on course to preach the gospel. Over the years he became my friend.

My friend died May 5th, 2010 – the irony is palpable – May 5th liberation day of the Netherlands, the country he loved and fought for.

I continually need to remind myself that it is true, and still I find myself in disbelief. Carl fooled his doctors once before when during rounds in a military hospital in Indonesia the reviewing doctor was heard to say "(expletive deleted), this guy is still alive." Carl heard him and frequently retold the story with great delight. The last time was only days before his death this time.

He was only in for a knee replacement, surgery as common as the cold. He had his other knee done before and why not? At 85 he was strong, virile and hearty. Knee surgery? ... a walk in the park for this larger-than-life figure of vim and vitality. A big man. As my six-year-old grandson said, a "big Man of God." He was felled by a bloody clot. The end. The end? Yes and no.

Life to the fullest

While he lived, he lived fully – ebullient, with zest and a lust for life and laughter. Sometimes he lived dangerously, at other times dangerously courageous, but always fully committed to God, family, friends and country. His self-deprecating humor was a source of delight, yet he glowingly warmed to the praise of others. He served God without reserve, yet often with a somewhat Jewish irreverence that seems foreign to some of us. I say this entirely without prejudice, as I love a free-wheeling interchange between God and his people.

Carl's appetite for life would not be sated, his thirst for living was unquenchable and his capacity for adventure was seemingly unlimited. By 4 o'clock each day he had already accomplished more than many would in a week. No wonder that by that time he was just, well ... plain thirsty.

He was a great raconteur. Even to him, his own stories got better and better over time. He enjoyed life and life took a shine to him, that is to say, amusing things happened to Carl, all the time, and no one enjoyed relating them more than he did himself. I always loved hearing him tell (or more correctly, retell) stories in which I played a part, as I always came out better or more amusing than I had remembered. I could not wait for him to tell it the next time.

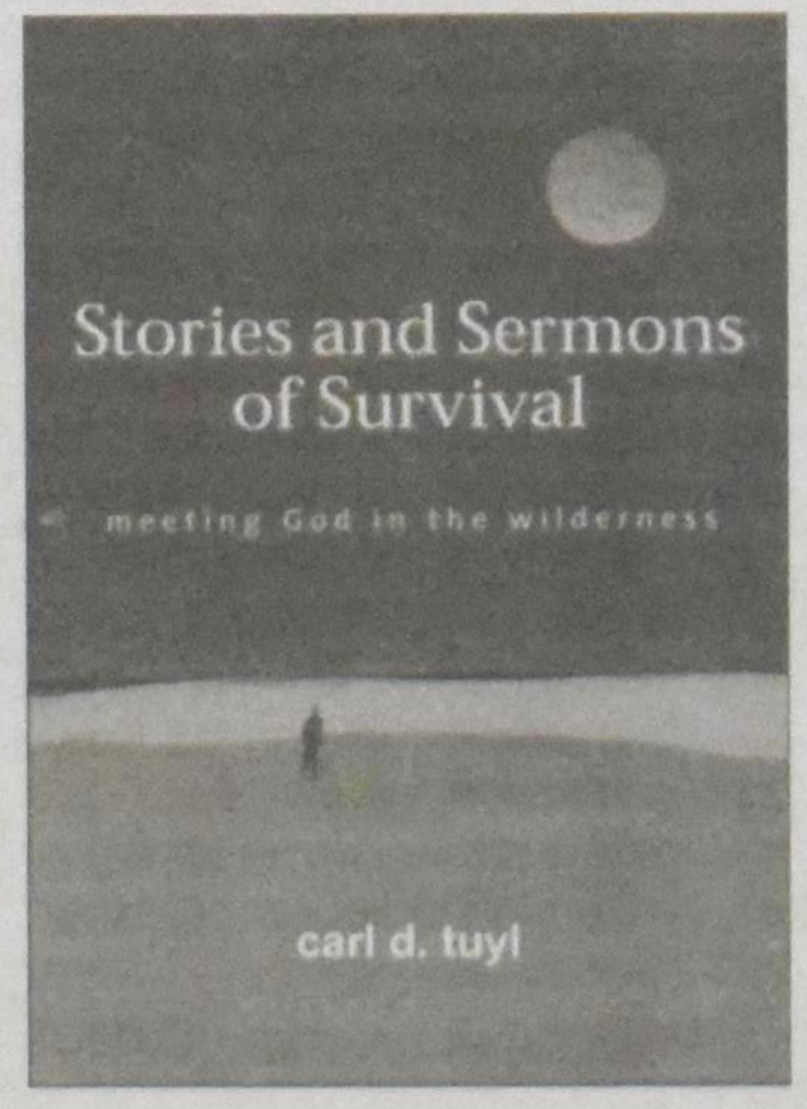
Florida, March 25, 2010: we, Kathryn and I, have been invited to Carl's winter abode, along with numerous other friends and acquaintances from Canada, for happy hour to celebrate our stay in Florida and to reflect on the season and plans for next year. Carl always had a reason to celebrate, but if truth be told he really did not need a special reason. Life was enough reason to celebrate and Carl did frequently.

On this occasion he conspired and planned together with Rev Harry Bierman to provide relief for the local (Pinellas Park Fla) CRC minister (Rev. Broekema) next year for the period of February and March. Carl and Harry would split the preaching between them. The purpose of this proposal was to give Rev Broekema the local overworked and underpaid minister of Pinellas Park a break from his hectic pace. His workload consisted of single-handedly keeping this small dwindling Pinellas congregation from disappearing altogether. Carl was adamant that this historic church should survive. The proposal would give the congregation a financial lift, give Rev. Broekema a much needed break and give Carl opportunity to preach four times during his two-month winter vacation in Florida, lucky Carl, lucky congregation.

Carl loved life, he loved people, he loved the church, but most of all he loved to preach. He had a great compassion (especially for veterans) and appreciation for others (especially ministers), virtues I expect that only one veteran or one minister can have for another. I am reminded he also liked women. I rarely heard Carl criticize anyone and never a veteran or another minister, although he frequently stated strongly negative feelings about the church for their miserly treatment of retired ministers ... niggardly pensions. He himself was one of the most generous people I have ever met. He shared freely his time, his hospitality, his possessions and his thinking. We spoke much of "universalism" and "*contra-remonstranten*."

Comfort in suffering

On the pulpit I see a black and silver prophet, a powerful presence, a warrior proclaiming peace. I can honestly say, the older he got, the better his sermons – or maybe the older I got, the more I appreciated his sermons. They were never condemnatory, never mere theology or the fidgeting or forcing of texts into some structural mode or tradition of interpretation. He did not preach as though he had all the answers, in fact, he would readily admit that he did not. His job, and he did it superbly, was simply to expose, to uncover, to declare comfort and salvation, and the "all-will-be-right, God-is-in-charge" message of the scripture. He found this message, this comfort and the presence of Christ, suffering with his people, always and everywhere. I believe it is that reality and that reliance that allowed Carl to live with his overwhelming memories of pain and suffering. As Christ lives the pain and suffering of the world, so, I believe, Carl was in tune with our worries, anxieties and pain. He knew where to obtain relief as his own path to that well of healing was deep and worn.



He was able to pull his listeners into the scripture to revel in the richness and the promise. For me he represents the preaching that has kept me in the church. He did not mislead, he did not condemn, he did not avoid the real trials of human existence, but, rather, he preached the word in terms of hope and assurance that all will be well. I often listened in awe when he raised his gnarled and maimed hands, gathering in the congregation for a blessing, which he frequently spoke in lyrical and moving phrases that transported the listener to a holy place. I always listened with open eyes.

No pat answers

When we sing "Faith of our fathers" I must admit it doesn't always leave me feeling entirely honest or reassured, let's face it, the faith of our fathers often embodies ignorance and arrogance, and is frequently mixed with a goodly ungodly measure of historical prejudices. Carl, on the other hand, wore his own faith like a comfortable suit, it embraced him as he embraced life. There was no dichotomy

With respect to current issues in the church – i.e., the role of women or the equal treatment and acceptance of homosexuals – he never relied on or accepted historical, pat answers to the seemingly vexing problems, posed by a fearful church through alarming interpretations or even silly explanations, wrought by a paternalistic and male-dominated church. Doubt needs expression, and discussion is never wrong. " My yoke is easy and my burden is light" was hardly a hallmark of the church or traditionally preached in my lifetime, but Carl was able to make that concept come alive.

He did it beautifully, for he was very adept in his use of the English language, frequently he was poetic, an artist, painting pictures that resonated with his listeners and reached to their very innards. He understood how things were, but more importantly, he was so very capable of telling us how things would be, in doing so he frequently touched my soul. I don't know how, or why he was able to do this, but I personally never experienced it so regularly with any other preacher. I somehow feel I owe my spiritual life to him. Can you understand why I feel that as of May 5th my life has changed?

A happy eternity

I realize that this has gotten to be a long statement and that, perhaps, some may think it should not take this long to declare someone a saint. Indeed, I have no wish to do so. I know some of what I have said can be used by his detractors to deny him sainthood forever. Well, that is *their* opinion. I have tried to say what Carl meant to me. That is all.

I do not know to what extent the CRC recognized his great leadership, his ability, his wisdom and his vast compassion and understanding. I do not know the extent to which the CRC is familiar with Carl's overwhelming life experiences during the war, his incarceration in camps of labour and cruelty, his being left for dead on a dusty road-side in a war-torn Indonesia. I do not know to what extent the church has felt his pain and suffering. He did not trumpet it. But I do believe that he harboured until his death unspeakable pain and memories of war and man's inhumanity to man, memories he was unable to face during his lifetime. Pain, suffering and unbearable memories, now by his own gospel, wiped away; they never were.

One can envision a number of heavenly beings standing around with amused observance of Carl's obviously new knee, an earthly attempt to restore a weakened body, resulting in death, resulting in total restoration of the body and life eternal. I suspect "they" are also aware of the poignant truth that it was Carl's life experiences of pain and suffering that brought him wisdom and understanding and us so much relief and joy through his preaching. I do not know why it had to be this way. It doesn't seem quite fair.

I hear it said, "it was his time," or even, "God wanted him home." I must say, that does not quite do it for me. Why was it his time when so clearly he could have gone on for another 15 years? Why did God want him home when he was doing so much good here?

A bloody clot...is that what God wanted? I doubt it.

For us? Not so good. For Carl, who recently confirmed that he loved life but at the same time was ready to go, it is everything – heavenly peace and love, a happy hour become a happy eternity.

Maybe St. Peter will even let Carl preach some time. I hope so. But meanwhile, man, we sure do miss you, Carl.

Wietse Posthumus is a semi-retired lawyer living in Toronto, Ontario.

Classifieds

Anniversaries

He named it 'Ebenezer' saying,
"thus far has the Lord helped us." 1 Sam. 7:12b

With much joy and thankfulness we celebrate with

JOHN AND RIEMKE (Huisman) HIEMSTRA

our Dad and Mom,
60 Years of Marriage on May 31.

Open House: July 26, 1-5 p.m. Monday.
Banner Mountain Lodge, Smithers, B.C.

Mailing address: Box 92 Telkwa BC V0J 2X0

Annette and George Dehaan
Ida and Thys Jaarsma
Sylvia and John Mensonides
Johanna and John Bain
Thelma and Jim Amsing
Jennifer and Steve Gehl
Anne and Ed Aasen
Deenie and Ken Bouwman
And all their families.

With thankfulness to God,
we celebrate with our parents,

JOHN AND RITA KLOMPS

their **50th Wedding Anniversary**
on June 3

We love you very much.
Jane and John Vanderlaan
Laura, Abbey
Carol and John VanRavenstein
Lindsay & Steve
Elaine and Frank Eerkes
John, James
Judy and Dave Taylor
Owen, Luke, Marieka

Home address: 6363 Osprey Blvd
Mississauga ON L5N 6G7

Celebrating 40
years of marriage

Joe & Alida Reitsma
June 14, 1970
Songs of Songs 8: 6,7
"Place me like a seal over your heart...
for love is as strong as death..."

Katrina & Bryan Campbell
Sonya, Theodore, Owyn
Sarah & Dan Brouwer
Neil, Alinda, Heidi, Timothy
Angela & Allan Bick
Robin, Alba
Joella & Wayne De Boer

138 Queen St.
Bowmanville, ON
L1C 1M9

Richard & Margie Reitsma
May 23, 1970

604 Eighth St.
Rock Rapids, Iowa
51246

Aleatha & Matt Matthias
Benjamin, Anna Belle
Heather & Dave Springer
Zachary, Nathan, Aaron, Anika
Amy & Kurt Hillegonds
Maya, Jana, Cole
Deborah & Michael Webb
Hannah, Logan

"we have been blessed"

Obituaries

Hogezand, Groningen — Strathroy, Ontario

On April 30, 2010, the Lord graciously called
into his eternal presence

GRIETJE (Grace) CATHARINA VANDER BORGH-OLDENZIEL

just two weeks shy of her 101st birthday.
We are comforted by the knowledge that
she has been set free from all earthly pain and sorrow
and now rejoices in heavenly glory.

Predeceased by her beloved husband Solke in 1998 and lovingly remembered by her children:
Jean (Adrian) Van Geest, *Mount Hope, ON*
John Vander Borgh, *Houston, TX*
Winnie Vander Borgh, *Humble, TX*
Herman (Marjory) Vander Borgh, *Listowel, ON*
Nettie (Jerry) Kiers, *Lethbridge, AB*
Rita (Jerry) Kavanaugh, *Amherstburg, ON*
and by 17 grandchildren and 43 great-grandchildren

Corresponding address: Jean Van Geest,
77 Northernbreeze St
Mount Hope ON L0R 1W0

On April 26, at the age of 45, after a short illness, the Lord took unto himself our dear son-in-law, brother-in-law and uncle:

GERARD WILLIAM HOFTYZER

of Londesborough, Ontario

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.
2 Cor. 5:1

May this knowledge be a comfort for his wife and children who so dearly loved him; Bernice Hoftyzer (Rumph), Darryl, Michelle, Krista and Robert.

Hilbert and Diny Rumph, *Drayton, Ontario*
Alfred and Helen Rumph, *Drayton, Ontario*
Jacqueline and Ron Vanderwees, *Winkler, Manitoba*
Nancy Rumph, *Fergus, Ontario*
Arnold and Teresa Rumph, *Moorefield, Ontario*
and their families

Box 4, Drayton ON N0G 1P0

Ijzendoorn, The Netherlands — Cameron, Ontario, Canada
Jan. 19, 1933 — April 21, 2010

O LORD Almighty,
blessed is the man who trusts in you.
Psalm 84:12

RUTHGER (Rudy) FINTELMAN

Beloved husband of Jantina (nee Herder)

Loving father and grandfather of:
Ron & Kim, *Cameron, ON*
Greg, Nicole, Erik
Irene & John Westerveld, *Limehouse, ON*
Nathan, Michael, Steven, Daryl
Nancy & Sieger Duursma, *Telkwa, BC*
Kimberly, Laura, Marissa
Marianne & Richard Bossema, *Cameron, ON*
Andrew, Adriana, Aaron

Lovingly remembered by his stepmother
Alie Fintelman.

Dear brother of: Dick (Verna), Marie Korevaar (Jack), Rick (Henny), Eefje Sedore (Neil), Jane Sedore (Ross), the late Art (survived by Marion), the late Peter (survived by Eleanor) and the late Arnold (survived by Carol).

Predeceased by his parents
Peter and Evertje Fintelman.

Lovingly remembered by his sisters-in-law Riek Herder, Gerie Herder and Johanna Herder and many nieces and nephews.

Correspondence: Mrs. Tina Fintelman
3730 Hwy 35 RR 2, Cameron ON K0M 1G0

July 27,1964 — April 26, 2010
Belleville, Ontario — Londesborough, Ontario

On April 26, after a brief illness,
the Lord took home, his child

GERARD WILLIAM HOFTYZER

beloved husband of Bernice (nee Rumph)
dear father of Darryl, Michelle, Krista & Rob
dear son of Ralph & Elly Hoftyzer

Loved brother of:
Rita & Ed Koster
Linda & John Drost
Anne & John Stevens
Cheryl & Tim Mulder
Yvonne & Jeff VanSoest
He will be sadly missed by his nephews & nieces.

The funeral took place in Goderich on April 30 and was officiated by Rev. Stephen Tamming of the Trinity Christian Reformed Church.

Jesus said: In my Father's house are many rooms,
if it were not so I would have told you.
I go there to prepare a place for you. John 14:2

Corresponding address: Ralph & Elly Hoftyzer
10 King St PO Box 424
Drayton ON N0G 1P0

PETER HESSELS

May 6, 1922 – April 22, 2010
was called home by his Lord & Saviour –
just two weeks short of his 88th birthday.
He died peacefully surrounded by his family.

Survived by his loving wife of 59 years
Aaltje Hessels (nee Groote)

Children, Grandchildren & Great-grandchildren:
John & Ellen Hessels — *Brampton ON*
Greg & Aileen, Janice
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Fanny & Klaas Fluit, Hilly & Marissen Stevens (*Neth.*),
Lucas† & Klaasje (*Neth.*), Be & Jantje (*Neth.*)

Brother-in-law to: Hendrik† & Co†, Aaldert† & Trein†,
Rika & Hendrik Bruinsma, Janny & Louis† Schoen,
Femmy & Albert Bouman, & Annie & Markus† Beil
(All of *the Netherlands*)

Funeral was held at the Mountainview CRC, Grimsby
on Tuesday, April 27, 2010

Corresponding Address: Anne Lemstra RR2
Binbrook ON L0R 1C0

Psalms 23 *'The Lord is my Shepherd'*

CARL DIRK TUYL

It is with profound sadness but overwhelming gratitude for the gift of his life that we announce that Carl Tuyl went home to his Lord, whom he served so faithfully, on May 5, 2010, Liberation Day: the day of celebration to mark the end of the occupation of the Netherlands, his birthplace. Born April 11, 1925, he leaves the legacy of a life filled with gratitude, service, vibrant joy and many wonderful 'happy hours' with family and friends too numerous to count.

He was predeceased by his beloved wife Martje in 2004. He so wonderfully enriched the lives of his children Corrie, Dian (Henry) Alice (Brian) and Derrick (Diane), his good friend Barb, his loving companion Wilhelmina, nine grandchildren and relatives in The Netherlands and Canada.

A memorial service was held Monday, May 10 at 1:00 p.m at the First Christian Reformed Church, 67 Taunton Rd., Toronto.

In lieu of flowers, donations to: Chaplaincy Ministry Development Fund 3475 Mainway PO Box 5070 Stn LCD1, Burlington ON L7R 3Y8 would be appreciated.

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Bolt *...continued from p.11*

Declaration of 1934, and the Belhar Confession of 1986.) The three major points of Accra are:

a) "Matters of economic and environmental justice are not only social, political, and moral issues: they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church."

b) Today's problematic global economy requires that the church take a united stance against the structures of today's global economy.

c) The church must be guided by its solidarity with suffering and struggling people. The Accra Confession "views the current world (dis)order by 'looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people.'" (from WARC pamphlet on Accra)

The CRC's Interchurch Relations Committee judged that "the Accra Confession oversimplifies the causes of global poverty, and there is an inadequate basis for the conversation about covenanting to which we are called." (*2009 Agenda for Synod*, 266) I fully agree and highlight it here as a indicator of the problem that the Belhar heaps on our plate.

The Belhar gives us one fundamental hermeneutic principle for wrestling with the complexities of social, economic, and political realities in our world: God is for justice, and justice is a matter of identifying with the oppressed, the poor, the suffering, the marginalized. God is on their side in a special way, and so, too, must we be.

In practice this is quite unhelpful. It gets us into fierce debates about victimization (today the white minority in South Africa?) and provides no constructive counsel for proper justice and social order. People who are liberated from oppression often themselves become oppressors. Who decides when oppression has been removed? Does it have to be perfectly removed before the demands of "social justice" are met? Will that ever happen in this life?

The Belhar addresses a real issue and had it simply declared that it is a sin for the church to divide entrance to the table of the Lord on the basis of race or ethnicity, we could applaud it and fully embrace it as a statement for the ages. Instead, it chose to make a *political* statement. Apartheid in South Africa is over, and the Belhar itself is now an outdated confession in its own original context; even in its restricted attention to race I do not see its clear relevance to our North American situation. Add to that the ambiguity of possible extension of its moral principles and it seems to me that adopting it as a fourth confession would not be prudent for the CRCNA.

Dr. John Bolt is a professor of systematic theology at Calvin Seminary.

Note: The debate series has been posted online at http://christiancourier.ca/Belhar.html

Event: The **Unity, Reconciliation and Justice Conference** will equip your church to study the Belhar Confession. It's on Sat. May 29th in London at the University of Western Ontario. The website can be accessed at www.crcna.org/news or on the Classis Toronto website.

Chong *...continued from p.11*

guilt-by-association logic to judge the Belhar. We should judge the Belhar, or any document, based on its own contents and merits. As a Christian pastor in a secular university, I am always at the receiving end of guilt-by-association logic by atheists, feminists and people of other faiths. People judge me and label me because of what other Christians have done even before they know me as a person, even before I have done or said anything to them. It is so frustrating and unpleasant an experience that I do not wish to subject anyone or anything else to that kind of logic. I don't think it is Christ-like to make judgments based on guilt-by-association.

Thirdly, on a more spiritual note, are we allowing our fears to dictate our faith? Instead, should not our faith in God's guidance and protection temper our fears for the "what ifs"? How will it affect our faith if we allow our fears to be the decisive factor in confessing or not confessing the Belhar? Should not our beliefs be dictated by our faithfulness to God's Word and not by our fears of change? To reject the Belhar based on fears of political agendas is to fall into the very same trap that we accuse the Belhar of. We are making a confessional decision based on political fears rather than on theological truths. Our rejection, then, will be a thinly veiled political decision clothed in theological orthodoxy. Likewise, if we adopt the Belhar based on hopes for particular political agendas, then we would be guilty of letting our politics shape our faith. We should either reject or adopt the Belhar, or any confession for that matter, based on whether we believe it is faithful to the gospel's integrity and, hence, whether it will help us as a denomination towards gospel integrity and faithfulness to Scripture.

Useful in Canada

Let me end by suggesting with what else, besides racism and poverty, the Belhar might help us engage. In Canada, the Belhar might be helpful in our ministry to aboriginals or First Nations people. In Canada, Christianity needs a lot of reconciliation with aboriginals due to the history of Church-run residential schools that forcefully separated aboriginal children from their families in order to indoctrinate them into Western culture and religion, along with numerous cases of physical and sexual abuse. Belhar's theme on reconciliation and justice might offer some guidance on that matter.

Another area the Belhar might help us in is the development of inter-cultural churches. Belhar, in my reading of it, actually goes against the idea of mono-cultural ethnic churches, for example, churches that are solely Korean, Black, Hispanic or Chinese. The Belhar's theme of unity that "must become visible" suggests that local churches should become more and more diverse and inter-cultural rather than segregated (albeit voluntarily) along ethnic and cultural lines. I suspect that this, too, might be another reason for ethnic minority Christians to reject the Belhar, as they are protective of their mono-cultural churches. Perhaps, the Belhar might be a wake-up call for them to journey into becoming churches that reflect the inter-cultural vision of Revelation 7:9.

Endnotes

1 From the preamble to the Canons in the CRC's Psalter Hymnal, p. 926.
2 The accompanying letter can be read online at http://www.crcna.org/pages/belhar_letter.cfm
3 See the press story in the Banner here: http://www.thebanner.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=1906 and the press release by the URCSA for the fuller story here: http://modsouth.blogspot.com/2008/10/pressstatement-of-executive-on-boesak.html

Shiao Chong is the Christian Reformed Campus Minister serving at York University in Toronto.

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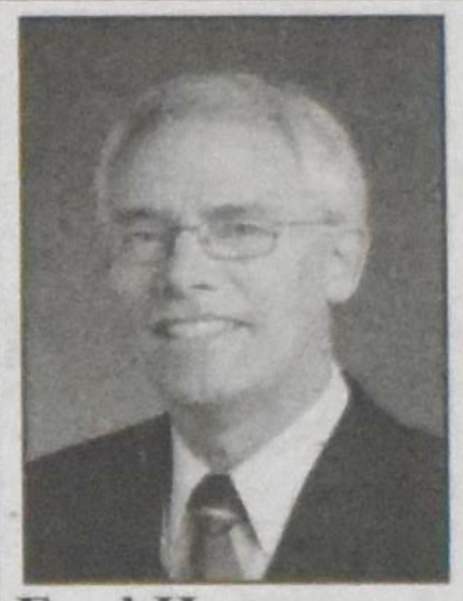
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 29 Unity, Reconciliation and Justice conference to equip your church to study the Belhar Confession will be held at the University of Western Ontario, **London**. The website can be accessed at www.crcna.org/news or on the Classis Toronto website at www.classistoronto.org

May 30 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Herman Praamsma will be preaching.

June 9 Hollandse Dag at the Moorefield Community Centre. 10 a.m. More details in May issues.

June 16 Hollandse Dag 10:00 am at First Christian Reformed Church, 310 Kingscourt Avenue, **Kingston**, ON Speaker:Rev John Klomps. Topic "Herinneringen uit mijn reizen"(Luistert U mee?) For Info call 613-546-5615

June 26, 27 Come celebrate the 50th anniversary of HCCS (formerly Athens Christian School). Contact www.hccs.ca or 613 498 4176.

July 1 Frisian Picnic starting at 11 am at Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area, **Paris**, Ontario. Contact fyskedei@hotmail.com

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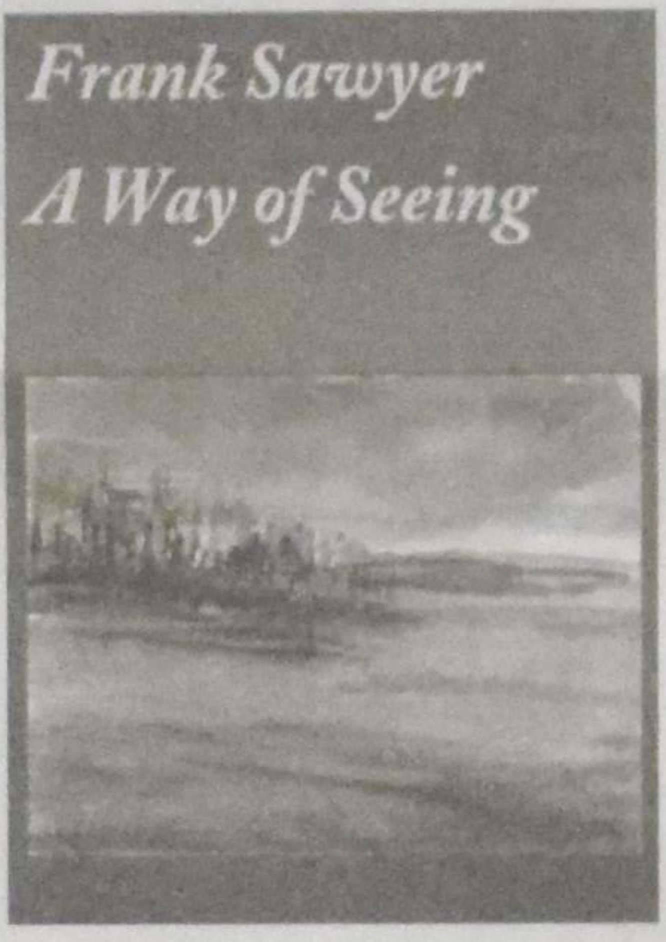

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News

Letting God work without words:

The story of one woman and many hearts

Anita Brinkman

Inn-keeper Theresa Nadeau and Neil, a customer.

CHATHAM, Ont. –There's something different about this restaurant. It's not just the Bible-themed murals, the low prices, the not-quite-matching tables, or the friendly servers – one of whom the regulars call 'Mom'. In this restaurant, all customers are treated equally, with respect and real care. People in need of a nourishing meal and a place to warm up can come and eat for just four or five dollars. Deeper needs are met here too. A room set aside for prayer and conversation, tucked away near the back of the building, is designated the 'healing room.'

This restaurant, called the "Shepherd's Way Inn," is operated by Theresa Nadeau of Chatham, Ontario. She started the project eight years ago because she was 'fed up' with how some people were treated differently from others. She wanted to start a place "where everyone is welcome, where people's needs can be met – people in pain, people who are searching." She used her own money to rent and renovate a building, applied for a restaurant licence, and set up what would become a unifying agent for local churches and a refuge for many.

The Inn recently reopened at a new location; in the sixteen months it took volunteers to do necessary structural work and renovations, many regular customers wanted to know when the new site would open "so we can come home." It is not hard to understand why there are so many regulars at this restaurant. The food is healthy, tasty, and priced lower than probably any other restaurant in town. While she stresses that it is not a soup kitchen or a food bank, Nadeau admits that for those who are truly in need, there is no cost at all.

"Sit anywhere you like!"

Many people come for the atmosphere of kindness and fellowship. Staff – all volunteers – joke good-naturedly with regulars, and newcomers are often drawn into the banter. Nadeau, a volunteer herself, is there every day, where she often sits in the dining area, available to listen or to offer a word of encouragement. Asked to describe a typical day, Nadeau responds, "It's a little difficult to say. The moment I open the door in the morning, I don't know what's going to happen. I open the door and say, 'Good morning, Father. What would you have me do today?' because I'm the innkeeper, but God owns it. God prepares me for only who he's going to send me." On some days, she explains, ten people might come in with small problems, and other days only two will come, but with huge problems.

Nadeau relates the story of one woman who, overcome with life and its trials, intended to commit suicide. She passed the restaurant and came in as a last resort. After talking with Nadeau for over an hour, the woman accepted Christ and, in her own words, "started a new life that day." Another woman, when Nadeau approached to take her order, said, "Don't tell me about the Bible or God or Jesus or anything like that!" Nadeau simply looked at her and replied, "It's a restaurant." The woman began coming regularly. None of the staff "pushed Jesus on her." but she watched their actions carefully. One morning she met Nadeau at the door and said, "I want to know *your* God." Sometimes, says Nadeau, "Love and service open the door for God to work without words."

> Love and service open the door for God to work without words.

A new evangelism

To anyone interested in starting a similar project, Nadeau gives this advice: "Have lots of patience." She smiles as she adds, "Don't count the hours you'll put in." Volunteers and donors are essential to the restaurant. Volunteers come regularly to cook and serve meals, and regular donations from churches and individuals help to keep costs down and allow for extra help given to those in need. The main thing, she emphasizes, is to trust God for everything. "As long as God wants this place open, it will stay open." She pauses thoughtfully. "The rewards are so worth all the time and the effort. The rewards . . . " She shrugs, unable to come up with a word that will express how the "Shepherd's Way" has fulfilled her, too.

Anita Brinkman is a part-time tutor and freelance writer from Chatham, Ontario.

ODDS AND TRENDS

Happy 84th to the Queen

There's a lot to celebrate on Victoria Day in 2010. It's not just a statutory holiday; it's Queen Elizabeth's symbolic birthday and the unofficial start of summer in her ex-colony. As far back as 1854, Canadians have marked their monarch's birthday, whether with flags, fireworks, or a "two-four" of beer over the first warm long weekend. Although the holiday is named after Victoria (1819-1901), it now represents the reigning monarch's birthday, regardless of his or her actual birthday (Elizabeth's was in April).

The date has also gained notoriety in Canada as a reliable signpost for the end of winter. In Alberta, ski resorts near Banff will finally close this weekend; Ontario Place will set off fireworks over Toronto's harbour, and in Victoria, B.C., residents will take to the streets for a parade. Meanwhile, all across Canada, ice-cream shops and zoos will open, cottage-owners will pry apart their shuttered windows, and gardeners will joyfully transplant those seeds begun indoors in the waning days of dark February.

The Queen visits Alberta May 24, 2005.

Friendship's frontiers

When our daughter turns five in a few weeks, she's allowed to have five friends at her party. And according to Robin Dunbar, Oxford University's professor of evolutionary anthropology, friendships within Facebook need limits, too. Since the 1990s, Dunbar has been working on a theory he calls Dunbar's Number, which asserts that the human brain can manage a maximum of 150 friends. He says "this number applies to different societies and has remained unchanged throughout history."

When it comes to social networking sites like Facebook, Dunbar has compared the traffic at the sites of people with thousands of friends and those with a hundred or less, and found no significant difference between their levels of interaction. In other words, humans cannot maintain meaningful relationships with more than 150 people at a time. But don't tell this birthday girl that Dunbar defines a "meaningful relationship" merely as making annual contact, or she might want to make that party list a little longer.

Food for the aged

Healthy eating seems to make the headlines constantly. There's more awareness, for example, that children perform better in school with nutritious food and with as little sugar as possible.

But Darra Goldstein, editor of *Gastronomica,* wants us to pay attention to another minority. She points out that "hardly anyone is speaking about better food for the elderly" because their eating habits are not a public health issue in the same way as childhood obesity. "But providing pleasure through food is not frivolous," she says. "What and how we eat are crucial to the quality of our lives."

Even when care facilities provide nutritionally sound meals, Goldstein argues, the food often lacks taste and precludes enjoyment. It's common sense that better food can impact a person's mood, even if that person is suffering from Alzheimer's, and studies out of Sweden have proved that familiar foods can even "stimulate memories and improve cognition."

Goldstein admits that it's simpler for an institution to serve the same meal to 100 people, but she insists that questions about each person's likes, dislikes, and comfort foods could be easily added to intake paperwork. "The aromas and flavours of times past," she says, "enable us to reconnect with the world, reawakening appetite not only for food but life."

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